EXCLUSION IN SOPHOCLES

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Abstract

Social exclusion as a literary theme is common to all of Sophocles' fully extant plays as well as some of the longer fragments. The variety of settings is wide, between exclusion from the family like for example in *Electra*, exclusion from the city as in the case of Oedipus, from a regiment of the armed forces like in *Ajax* or *Philoctetes*, or even humankind, like with *Tereus*.

This inquiry sets out to present, taxonomize and unpack Sophoclean discourses of exclusion and their attaining literary tropes of the pathological, the bestial, the brutish, the monstrous, and the so-called uncivilized. The aim is to demonstrate how deeply implicated the whole cast of characters and their language are in the process of a tragedy unfolding, rather than the causes of tragedy being lodged in the doings of one protagonist alone.

One key point argued here is that, instead of taking 'the isolation of the tragic hero' as fait accompli, exclusion is a dynamic process that often takes up the entire plot arc of a tragedy. In the space of extrinsic characterization, it is argued that a process of rhetorical erasure and overwriting of identity takes place, where peer groups gradually dismantle a formerly well-established identity and re-assign a new and undesirable one. It is shown how the protagonists seek to resist, lament or somehow negotiate this process through long and expansive speeches of futile self-reinstatement. In the synthesis of both, it is argued that Sophocles' deployment of the theme puts a critical spotlight on the rhetorics of exclusion and its discourses of the bestial, the brutal, and especially the pathological, which embed and frame the work's overall literary, cultural and dramatic effects.

Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Arbeit belegt, dass Exklusion als Motiv sich durch alle erhaltenen Sophoklesstücke zieht nebst einiger der längeren Fragmente. Auffällig ist die Vielfalt des Motivs, welches sich auf einen Ausschluss aus der Familie (*Elektra*), der Stadt (*Ödipus*-Dramen), der Armee (*Philoktet*), der Gemeinschaft der Menschen (*Tereus*) und noch vieles Weitere bezieht.

Diese Arbeit sammelt, ordnet und analysiert sophokleische Exklusionsszenarien. Insbesondere wird der Gebrauch von Tropologien des Un/Menschlichen in der extrinsischen Charakterisierung der tragischen Protagonisten herausgestellt sowie damit verbundene Metaphern des Pathologischen, Monströsen, Bestialen und sog. Primitiven als Marker und Auslöser von strukturellen Exklusionen. Dabei wird das Exklusionsmotiv nicht als vollendete Tatsache erfasst, sondern als dynamischer und sich teilweise über ganze Plots hinweg erstreckender Prozess, als Narrativ eines ehemals gut Eingegliederten und von der Gemeinschaft nach und nach Exkludierten.

Gleichwohl diese Entwicklung vom tragischen Protagonisten in eloquenten und selbstdarstellerischen Reden vehement kritisiert wird, erwächst im Bereich der Metaphern und rhetorischen Bildsprache der Gemeinschaft eine regelrechte Ausradierung und Neuzuweisung seiner Identität. Durch eine vergleichende Gegenüberstellung beider Standpunkte stellt sich heraus, wie tiefgreifend die als Exkludierend handelnde Gemeinschaft in das Vorantschreiten des tragischen Geschehens involviert ist und die Dramen eben nicht nur—wie in zahlreichen Forschungsstandpunkten festgehalten—die Manci des Exkludierten Protagonisten als moralische Fabel vorführen.

Contents

Exclusion in Sophocles

I. Concepts, receptions, scholarship

"L'exclusion sociale" was a phrase coined in 1974 by the French policy-maker René Lenoir.[1] It referred to perceived failures of the post-1968 social reforms. More specifically, it meant to describe those social groups whom the reforms had left behind in a state of marginalization. More and more cut off from the central preoccupations of life and society in France, the French "banlieue" has been immortalized in 1990s French film and rap music. Socio-eonomic geography attests to this marginalization, for the banlieue is defined by its peripheral location in space vis-a-vis the city.[2] It is conceptualized as the space inhabited by entire communities and groups of people facing deprivation, exposure to crime, sub-standard housing and bad living conditions. The phrase "social exclusion" entered the formal discourse of European Union policy makers in the latter half of the 1990s: an "Exclusion Unit" was set up in Britain in 1997, with the task to produce reports on school truancy, homelessness and segregated social housing estates.[3]

The reflection upon social exclusion has a far longer lineage beyond the context of late 20th century policy-writing. Fundamentally entrenched with negotiations of identity, exclusion

1 Hague, Thomas & Williams (1999), 293.

2 Guilluy (2014), 9-10.

3 Byrne (2005), 1-2.

is founded upon the perception that certain identities are a bad fit for society. Why and how an individual or group will fall foul of society and what defines that society, is a question inscribed in highly politicized debate. On the level of being excluded from a sports club, one is perhaps merely not the right kind of sportsman. But when it comes to being marginalized by society as a whole, it becomes a question of knowing how and why a particular identity grates with the notion society has of itself. Such an inquiry soon arrives upon the terrain of fundamental definitions: what defines society, who belongs and who does not, and what does this mean psychologically for the individual.

Habermas elucidated the fission between personal private identity and identity as a citizen of a certain state, as part of a system that stipulates what should be the norm, and creates a number of prescriptive identity roles.[4] Gender theory has criticized the performative nature of gender roles, and in particular Zeitlin has discussed how deeply the reversal of gender roles in Athenian drama is a reflection upon the scripted nature of gender roles.[5]

Where it is understood as emancipatory, the individual's departure from his or her socially inscribed identity is considered liberating, while continuing to perform a pre-fabricated identity would be considered psychologically masochistic, as Lagache has argued.[6] Where it is involuntary, perhaps the result of unfortunate developments like the loss of good health, expulsion from the

4 Habermas (1973), 222-27; a critical reading of Habermas' concept of identity is provided by Belgrad (1992).

5 Zeitlin (1985), 66.

6 Lagache (1958), 41-3; for synthesis and history of the concept see Bertrand & Bourdellon (2009), 5-10.

family or the loss of a job, an individual's departures from socially approved identities can soon translate into a state of exclusion.
Exclusion is a process, that develops through language, through how a person is described, describes himself or herself; where perceptions diverge or concur, and where the loss of identity is apt to engender tragedy. In fact, Horkheimer and Adorno argued that commercial film's formulaic presentation of fake and only very superficially identifiable characters that were designed to invite the self-identification of 'everyman', inaugurated “die Liquidation der Tragik”.[7] In other words, there is no tragedy where there is no deep identity.
This all happens on the level of language: identity is constructed through discourse, or rather through several channels of discourse such as gender, race, religion, familial, professional and political position, sexuality, age, and health. It is true today as it was in ancient Athens that these components combine to produce an individual's identity, and embed the individual within the narrative of a collective organism. Exclusion means, then, to fall foul of society's identity politics; it means splitting from the ideology of a group that defines society and its desiderata. It is through possession or loss of a desirable identity (or identities) that an individual is or is not part of a collective organism.

The following discussion will deal with theatrical representations of a social transformation, of a re-assignment of identity. Such transformations emerge through the discursive exchanges within a social peer group, and also through the vivid complaints and contestations of individuals opposing the drift. We may find that concepts such as these are very useful for a reading of Sophocles.

7 Horkheimer & Adorno (2006), 163.

Sophoclean tragedy is like a catalogue of identity losses, identity denials, states of exclusion and processes thereof. This single theme strings together all of Sophocles' extant plays and fragments. Again and again, protagonists find themselves excluded from group entities: from the family unit, from the army, from the city. The spectator is beholden to scenes where individuals attempt to disrobe one another of their identities. Thus it is that Creon tells Antigone that Polyneices is “not her brother”; Tecmessa says that Ajax is “not the man she married”; Electra tells Clytaemnestra that she is “not her mother”, and so forth.

It has been said that all of tragedy features rituals of initiation,[8] i.e. that it puts on show the painful process of someone in transition, from one social position to another: from young girl to married woman, from adolescent to man, etc. This study of exclusion highlights the destructive nature of change, the crises and articulations of human suffering that arise of departure from a previous inclusion. For, in Sophocles' tragedies, a previous state of inclusion is always given: the protagonists are usually members of an aristocracy who inhabit various positions of privilege before their dramatic changes begin to erode their status, and re-negotiate their social identity. This erosion, transformation, or simply the negation of the protagonist's personal identity results in psychological distress, all the way to existential crises and an inability to survive.

As fictional tales, or as fables (as they are sometimes called in Latin, *fabulae*), the tragedies are perhaps a theoretical prolongation or abstraction of lived reality in Sophocles' Athens, or again a distorting mirror, a re-framing of the power dynamics at play in real life. Thinking about exclusion and identity in

8 Burkert (1966); Scullion (2002); Dodd (2003).

Sophocles means thinking about the sociology of a fictional society, one that its author has deliberately set in places other than Athens, in monarchies rather than democracies, in times gone by rather than the contemporary *polis*.

I would argue that this conceptual remove is certainly a caveat to our inquiry, but surely also a mere ruse to avoid overly direct correlations with Sophocles' own Athenian contemporaries in the way that, say, Aristophanic comedy deployed. As is often the case with deadly serious and unhappy tales, setting them at a certain remove from the audience is both a palliative and an invitation to engage on a conceptual level with the issues at hand. It is a Brechtian V-effect before its time, if you will. Ultimately, we may want to see the work of Sophocles as a mediatized presentation of social power dynamics that were recognizable also within the contemporary Athenian society, re-framed though they were, and an invitation to the spectator to contemplate these issues critically.

In this conceptualization, Greek tragedy does more than merely convey a frisson of morbid fascination. It is more than inconsequential entertainment for a disengaged audience, in the way that freak shows at an early 20th century amusement resort might have been. It is also more than a narcotic-like offering of psychological self-sublimation in a ritualized collective experience of death and re-birth, as theorists of catharsis have argued.[9] Greek tragedy surely has a part in those things, yet I argue that a residuum of discursiveness is always present, and it is impossible to rationalize away tragedy's discursiveness. It is within these parameters that the present discussion will take hold.

Exclusion in Sophocles manifests itself when an individual is no longer recognized. It can be because of a change in appearance,

9 On catharsis and the audience of tragedy, see Segal (1996).

like in *Philoctetes*, brought on by severe ill health and neglect. It can be for a drastic change in behaviour, like in *Ajax.* Differently again in *Trachiniae*, the acute disease that grips Heracles will make Heracles at long last appear to be a monster, rather than a man. Heracles had always been teetering on the borderline between man and monster. He will eventually fall into the latter category. In other words, the Sophoclean character in question becomes excluded by a distortion of his or her traits: physical, mental, or again political, like in *Antigone*. A point is reached where the individual becomes completely unrecognizable, or at least is *described* (and this is important) as unrecognizable, as bearing no relation to the person they once were. They are re-configured as somebody else. As we will see, Sophoclean tragedy yields a vast variety of such scenarios: some protagonists find themselves described as animal-like, some monster-like; or as a disease *in persona*; or as wild men from the woods; or as the blind puppets of an evil spirit, as the destructive automata of fate whose human soul has left them.

1. Social exclusion: three tropes

Many narratives of exclusion, no matter what their field of application, share certain lines of argument that are embedded in their discursive structure. The first notable trope of discourse here is the demand that an alternative version of history, or simply the past, be recognized in its validity. It argues that the establishment in power has the ability to shape and modulate how history is told, how events will be remembered, to the detriment of those actors of history whose contribution or perspective is played down or ignored. Marginalization, exclusion, an alternative version of the past: this could be a helpful key to read *Electra*, where Electra refuses to play along to the new rules in the house of Aegisthus, insists on commemorating Agamemnon, and therefore becomes an outcast. It could be a good key to read *Oedipus Tyrannus*, where all efforts are made to keep the real past submerged in ignorance.

At isolated moments in the texts of Sophocles, tangible forms of exclusion flash up in momentary images. A memory is shared, of how Oedipus was, at birth, cast out from the home, mutilated and conveyed with a servant to be exposed in the hills. In *Electra*, Chrysothemis lets Electra know that Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus have good mind to lock Electra into a dark cell—out of sight, out of mind. Creon plans to bury Antigone alive. And Philoctetes is left behind on an island, secretly, as the comrades tacitly agree on the plan and creep away to let him wake up alone. Such images and such actions are cruel and communicated in all their cruelty by their victims. The victims of such exclusion make eminently

audible complaints, sprawling over long speeches that contend with the system, accuse the perpetrators as individuals, and as the influential heads of whole groups. Philoctetes feels betrayed and victimized by a military corps whose values and virtues he once honoured, but that have now suddenly cheapened in his estimation, to the point that he will find them false and worthless. Oedipus will refuse to come back to Thebes when he is offered the opportunity; Ajax would rather kill himself than face the Achaeans again; and so on. These scenarios and the notion of how futile it is to recall an outcast back into society, are at the heart of our first section “Social exclusion and its discontents”.

Secondly, many discourses of exclusion share the trope of deploring how the excluded are demonized. The trope antagonizes the process of becoming profiled by false tales or myths. It antagonizes the perceived affinity with damning mythologies and myths that are pulled in as a shorthand to describe who the excluded people are, simultaneously justifying why they have to be excluded. This could work as a key to read *Philoctetes*, where the portrayal of a terrible disease that has supposedly enraptured Philoctetes' entire being and transformed him into a vile beast, goes far beyond the call of duty. Or *Trachiniae*, where Deianeira's deprecatory portrayal of her estranged husband builds up to a climax where Heracles virtually *is* the disease. In these instances, one may speak of de-humanization, of a discourse that pushes the character's identity into the domain of the monstrous, the bestial or the demonic. Examples of Sophoclean exclusions along the lines of this schema are presented and discussed in the second section, “De-humanization”.

Last but not least, discourses of social exclusion share the rhetorical *topos* of the periphery: to be pushed physically out and away from the center, is eminently symbolic of the immaterial, conceptual exclusion from society that governs the physical remove. There is mileage in this as a help to read *Antigone*, *Ajax*, and surely most of all *Philoctetes*. In their banishment to peripheral locations, the excluded characters are thrown into an obscure, uncharted territory outside the town, the mythical home of predatory beasts and monsters like cyclopes, skyllae or centaurs. Elements of this mythology, with all the threats and *frisson* that it confers, become absorbed in the characterization of the outcast.

This notion informs the examples discussed in our third section, “Limits of inclusion”. Here, special attention is devoted to the Homeric Polyphemus as a literary influence in the discourse of exclusion in tragedy, and to how monstrous characteristics are gradually accrued in the descriptions of excluded tragic protagonists. In the case of Greek tragedy—an art form that imminently inserts itself into literary tradition—the analysis of literary fiction and its use of myth plays a cardinal role. Certain tropes are particularly frequent or meaningful, and to understand the material it is inevitable to study some of them. The trope of the monstrous and the myth of Polyphemus, if put under critical scrutiny, are a mine of information about how exclusion works in the literary heterocosm of Sophocles' plays.

We will narrow this analysis down to a gendered form of exclusion, in the fourth section, “Sexual rejections”. Here, it is discussed how the dynamics of gender roles, how images of and sexuality, lust, rape and the institution of marriage, become minefields of negotiation and demonization of the opposite sex.

The fifth section, “Deliberate misunderstandings”, presents a few Sophoclean examples of communication failures. The plays not only show us how the tragic protagonist falling out of grace with the community. They also show how mutual understanding breaks down more and more, the proliferation of misunderstandings. Despite the many words uttered, many messages do not get across to the other side. Different discourses compete with one another: on the one hand, the community and its leadership hold and employ a certain language to describe and explain things, and on the other hand is the excluded protagonist who sees and tells things differently. While tragic protagonists are given the space of long speeches, their discourse is counter-weighed by the total of several smaller speaking parts sharing a common view. The tragic protagonist is outnumbered. We will close by looking briefly into of how this failure to understand one another is in part deliberate, and is in part a ruse to avoid becoming entrenched in the difficult negotiations of responsibility and blame for tragic events.

These are but broad brush strokes of social exclusion as a notion, which in reality has a vast number of fine ramifications into the big and small ways of social functioning and interactions. Discourses contesting somebody's exclusion posit a way in which the excluded party has been victimized by a society that insists that social outcasts have only themselves to blame. Critics of Greek drama have dealt with the notion of tragic character flaws and Aristotelian *hamartia* in ways suggesting that the tragic protagonists have only themselves to blame, yet the inspection of social exclusion and its discourses casts a wider net when it comes to determining blame for tragic events.

The conceptualization and description of social exclusion in the Sophoclean plays is in a constant field of tension as the (invariably extremely eloquent) protagonists give a different version and different angle on the story than do the leading voices of the community that is creating the scenario of exclusion. For this reason, the seventh section is dedicated specifically to the point of view of the tragic protagonist, their version of the story. The section “Submerged Scenarios” unfolds alternative narratives that directly contradict, or amply circumvent, the accusations of the main character having become monstrous or departed into a sphere of incurable irrational-ism.

2. Exclusion and the irrational

The following sketches the broad outline of scholarly literature on these aforementioned subjects in Sophocles and Greek tragedy more generally.

There is no history of the concept of exclusion in Greek tragedy apart certain studies on the historical context of exile (Grethlein, 2003; Gaertner, 2007). In fact, if we pass in review the many ways in which exclusion is dramatized by Sophocles, it soon becomes clear that the theme has many contexts of application. Examples of excluded individuals in Sophocles are the unburied body of Polyneices just outside Thebes in *Antigone*, the offended, introverted and deluded Ajax in *Ajax*, or the wounded, quarantined Philoctetes left behind to fend for himself on the uninhabited island Lemnos in *Philoctetes.* These three examples all share the theme of someone's exclusion in tragedy, yet are discrete from one other in many ways. Each story line opens up into the contemplation of different myths and different social issues warranting the exclusion respectively. The problem of Oedipus' incest, or of Philoctetes' rampant foot disease, say, leads into a discussion of the taboo of incest, or the place of diseased bodies in the social imaginarium, whereas for example Polyneices' burial leads into a discussion of civic values and the criteria of belonging or being cast out. The burial conflict at the end of *Ajax*, for all its similarity with the burial conflict in *Antigone*, sparks the debate in yet another direction, channelling Athens' cultural reception of heroic pride as an idea from the Homeric epic tradition within the new context of Athens' own

recent war efforts. It also makes inroads into a debate of Athenian citizenship or nationality, raising the issue of Ajax's national identity as a criterium for belonging to the group, not forgetting the most glaring feature, the discussion of how a society may handle its members who have gone insane.

Disease comes up again and again, in astonishing variety of literary permutations. As a representation of the protagonist's reality, like in *Philoctetes*, as a backdrop of an epidemic threatening to touch the central figures, like in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, as a symbol of moral decrepitude, like in *Oedipus Coloneus*, or a metaphor for the departure from human society into an animal-like existence, like in the Oedipus dramas and also *Philoctetes* and *Ajax*. Sophocles' life and work has more than once been noted for its intense relationship with medical themes and medical thought. We can zoom in particularly on the concept of disease as a gateway to social exclusion. Not seldom, the concept appears in the text dressed in the normative language of disease as departure from civilized living, or from living in a city—disease as an inroad into the realm of wilderness and of savage lifestyles. It has already been recognized that Sophocles uses the description of various diseases both as realistic plot elements, and as metaphors (Mitchell-Boyask 2008, Ceschi 2009, Jouanna 2012). In fact, Sophocles does so in ways that at times converge so strongly that it becomes impossible to distinguish between the "real" dramatic events, and the symbolic meaning of these events.

An important cornerstone in this argument will therefore be to read social exclusion always as a process, not as a state of being. In other words, social exclusion is something that happens to a character, like a disease, rather than a place relative to society in which this character always is. The disease of the tragic hero is

fictionally presented as a vector of their alienation from the group, which stipulates the unacceptability of their change. Like a disease, too, we will discover that Sophoclean portrayals of exclusion feature in-built remedies or paths of rehabilitation offered to the excluded, but are seldom effective.

Scholarly voices have often opined that Sophocles shows his audiences tales of *hubris* and downfall framed as cautionary tales for an audience of citizens whose moral values tragedy puts under scrutiny, but ultimately confirms and keeps intact. Yet, the cautionary tale interpretation could cast a much wider net: Sophocles not only shines a spotlight on individuals and the errors of their ways, but also stages the dynamics of collective responsibility for tragic events; a whole community's stake in one person's disastrous experience. In the case of *Oedipus Coloneus*, such a view is established since a long time (Slatkin 1986, Bernek 2004, Guidorizzi 2008, but also already Schneidewin-Nauck 1907), even though the debate on guilt, or Oedipus' personal responsibility for his own tragic life events is among the most vociferous and far-ranging in the scholarly literature.

Numerous studies take the tragic protagonist's exclusion as an indisputable given, often referring to it as "the isolation of the hero" (the seminal study here is Knox 1964) and then move on to discussions of the causes or reasons for this isolation, such as the infringement of norms (Vernant & Vidal-Naquet, 1986), fatal ignorance (Segal 2001) or irreconcilable conflicts of interests (de Romilly 1961; Blundell 1991).

This discussion aims to understand the tragedian Sophocles as an observer, presenter, moderator and critic of civic society, by zooming in on the topic of social exclusion, the limits of inclusion, and the critique of certain societal attitudes. In one way,

this study represents an elaboration upon an established tradition of interpreting Sophocles through the lens of analysing political ideology, or "civic ideology", as Goldhill (1987) termed it in his influential essay. Naturally, the analysis of civic ideology has strong bearings on any understanding of social exclusion and its functioning. But above and beyond that, this study aims to investigate deprecatory characterization in Sophocles as a vehicle for social exclusion. In the observation of the many ways a protagonist may fall from grace, the social trajectory from a state of integration to a state of exclusion is accompanied by an array of characterizations and re-characterizations of the protagonist's identity. Not seldom, they slip from a conceptualization as a member of society into a conceptualization as a beast or monster. Not seldom, this construction is illustrated by arguments referring to uncivil, animalistic or monstrous behaviours, deliberately clashing with consolations or admonitions to moderation and sagacity. The unacceptability of consolation (or of admonitions to be more measured in one's temper) tick over into what scholars have called the "irrationalism" of the tragic hero. Highly influential contributions to the scholarship on tragedy have circled the notions of irrationality and irrational violence, and established the concept of "the irrational" *per se*. To reconnect the history of this scholarship with the views on social exclusion, we will pass through a schematic aperçu of the history of the idea of irrationality in modern letters, its polemics, its strategic uses in politics, social policy, and entertainment. As recently as 2015, Billings & Leonard have written that

> "the concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysiac that emerge from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* have become

> crucial to understanding the interplay between sage reflection and violent irrationalism that marks the most powerful Greek tragedies".[10]

This sentence spans the arc from Nietzsche's 1872 discussion of Greek tragedy, until the 2015 appraisal of a "violent irrationalism" that the authors continue to see. One may wonder if "irrationalism" is a school of thought like other -isms (like rationalism, like modernism), or if it is just a convenient shorthand for the inquiry about irrational thought, weaving its way through the history of scholarship on tragedy since the late 19th century. In tragedy one certainly finds statements that contrast the wisdom of experience and sagacity against strong passions, like in this example of the chorus of Theban elders speaking of Antigone:

> δηλον τὸ γέννημ᾽ ὠμὸν ἐξ ὠμοῦ πατρὸς
> τῆς παιδός. εἴκειν δ᾽ οὐκ ἐπίσταται κακοῖς.[11]
>
> There's the obvious ferocious heritage from a ferocious dad
> in the daughter. She does not know how to bend under trouble.

Here, an appraisal of Antigone's adamant passion for justice invites a negative judgement of her character. Just when it all goes wrong for Antigone, the chorus tells Creon that her wild roots are finally coming through. The implication is that nothing can be done about it, that it simply is in her nature or the nature of her character. However, before we can take this for accurate, we must

10 Billings & Leonard (2015), 5.

11 Antigone 471-2 (Lloyd Jones & Wilson 1990: 202)

remind ourselves that the chorus is situated within the social economy of the text, anchored in its fictional society. This means the chorus has own interests to heed. The chorus is not simply the voice of reason or of truth, as they are keen to present themselves. The chorus often promote themselves as performing such a role, yet one must remain critical of that, and be wary of reading any words that come from inside the play to be objective. By definition, it is not possible for any voice in the drama to be objective. This point seems almost like a truism yet it has to be stated thus clearly.

In fact, in every play of Sophocles the analysis of narrative focalization will result in showing up the story is told from several different perspectives. It is never obvious that or why the audience's point of view should be identical with a particular one of these perspectives. Those characters in the drama who antagonize the protagonist, those who seek to calm down the protagonist's urges, the protagonist him or herself, and the chorus, are equally open to inspection and critique by the audience. Sophocles does not merely set up the protagonist and his or her tragic fate as the material for discussion, but also sets up the surrounding personages, who all together roughly fall into what might be called a fictional community, as an object of contemplation and discussion by the audience.

Discourses of rationality versus irrationality are always strategically charged. They can be contrived to create an impression of mutual exclusivity; and this is where the first point of contact comes between our concept of exclusion in tragedy, and the scholarship on irrationality in Greek drama. To call someone or someone's actions irrational is a first step in creating difference, in excluding them. To be on the side of rationality means to be on

the side of power. It is enticing for antagonists or opponents to cast each other as unreasonable, irrational, lacking in wisdom, or failing to be rational. To impute irrationality to the person who makes unwelcome propositions, or even to impute madness to him or her, can be a powerful argumentative strategy for eliminating this opponent. For example, a large portion of Ajax's apparent insanity can be analysed, clarified and explained. It is in fact quite easily possible to follow Ajax's logic. One section of this discussion is dedicated entirely to a discussion of Ajax, his madness, and the method in his madness. It lets us see that he is not as consistently crazy as it would evidently suit some of the characters in *Ajax* to portray him. In this optic, the accusation of irrationality appears in the guise of a politicized contraption serving certain arguments, serving the deprecatory characterization of individuals. It follows that, as always, we must contemplate each mention of irrationality with critical attention and watch for its strategic, its politicized, its deprecatory and divisive uses.

Billings & Leonard highlight (rightly, as I think) that irrationality and its attributes such as compulsive violence or its entrenchment in mythologies of the darkest hues continued to be prime topics of scholarly investigation through the 20th-century and until recent decades.

However, it must be said that in the text of Sophocles, the notions of rational versus irrational barely ever appear as a pair of opposites. They are not cast as mutual pendants in just such a duality, and if one searched for what really is meant by the English word “irrationality” in the Greek tragic text, one soon realizes that irrationality as a notion is difficult, if not impossible, to pin down. The above example from *Antigone* refers to a

dichotomy between ferociousness and sagacity, which roughly certainly translates into a modern conceptualization of rationality and irrationality. Yet the slippage in notion from ancient "ferocious" to modern "irrational" alerts us also to the fact that for the chorus in *Antigone*, the opposite of wisdom is ferocity. In *Ajax*, it is madness or insanity that comes to be opposed to wisdom, in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, incommensurate anger the delusions it nurtures. Rather than a single word or notion that describes irrationality—or at least, the opposite of rationality—in the text of Sophocles there is a whole array of notions, a whole array of attributes that could all come into consideration for defining the irrational. There is no single concept of irrationality in Greek drama, the opposite of reason is an aggregate of various attributes, impersonated by the behaviours of various characters.

What is more, rationality as such is not either presented with a single precise word or at least with a precise locution. Its notion too is spread out in great lexicographical variety over several different contexts. Sagacity, reasonableness, wisdom, shrewdness, moderation: these are all forms and names that square with our notions of rationality, and that tragic characters consider as superior. Qualities such as these are apt to confer power and give their owner the upper hand in an argument.

A rigorous study of the language actually used to refer to the realities covered by our modern concepts of rational vs. irrational would clarify many details here, but for the time being we only need to call into attention this issue of definitions and remind ourselves that a) the imputation of irrationality is a matter of strategy and not necessarily an evident fact and b) in Greek tragedy, irrationality—or irrational-ism, to pick up Billings & Leonard's phrase—is an aggregate of attributes rather than a

single notion. To cast someone as irrational is to exclude them from the community of well-thinking men (in tragedy it really is mostly men). The above example from *Antigone* used the adjective ὠμὸν ("ferocious"), which points in the direction of a discourse about wild animals; a glance at the comparable situation in *Ajax* reveals that here it is νοσεῖν ("to be ill") which comes is again and again shored up against φρονεῖν ("to think carefully").[12] Imputations of irrationality as we would term it, translate back into a variety of avenues of deprecatory characterization of the tragic protagonist, by his or her fellow actors that together form fictional communities. All of Sophocles' plays feature the theme of social exclusion, and this exclusion hinges on deprecatory characterization—as irrational, which, we understand branches out into a few different typologies. This is the key to all the readings of Sophocles that the present inquiry will offer.

Antigone's imputed ferocity offers an inroad into the characterization of the tragic protagonist as brutal, bestial, monstrous, possessed, or in some other way not fit for the community with citizens. Sometimes, this exclusion extends all the way to negating the protagonist's belonging to humankind altogether.

The opposition between city and country (of the "wild country" variety) plays host to a number of characterizations and re-characterizations that work toward the conceptual exclusion of the problematic protagonist. One thinks of Oedipus, always teetering on the verge of returning to the wild mountains from whence he came, where he was placed as an infant, and where he will lead a tattered existence in rags in old age. One thinks of Philoctetes, whose placement upon the abandoned island Lemnos seeps into a

12 Hershkovitz (1998), 24.

characterization of his entire existence as one whom crippling disease turned back into little more than a beast (at least in his conceptualization by Odysseus; untrue, of course).

Disease is a remarkably frequent cause for this process to begin. Beyond Sophocles' use of disease as a literary trope that symbolizes moral decay, disease can also be a plot device. A disease is biological, is physical: it necessarily has to progress over time. As they stall, improve or get much worse, the diseases of protagonists are what speeds them through a development. Bodily deterioration precipitates their fate in terms of what happens to their body, and it illustrates the whole person's departure into another sphere of life: Sophocles' literary diseases come packaged in a rhetoric of human animality, bestiality, even monstrosity.

Odysseus, Tecmessa, Deianeira, Clytaemnestra, Oedipus, the chorus of villagers from Colonus, each in their own way insert layers of such language in their description of disease and the sufferer of the disease. It is always the antagonistic protagonist who happens to be the sufferer of such diseases, which in itself is a matter of some note. Speakers who describe diseases wrap their accounts in images conjuring up the vision of a human being retrogressing to its brute state, engaging in brutal behaviours, falling backwards into a pre-civilized state. In Hippocratic writing, disease is sometimes illustrated as a reversion to pre-civilized life forms. Here, good health is thought of as the result of civilized living, for example eating cooked food instead of raw foods is thought to have advanced both human health and cultural refinement. By contrast, the pre-civilized age of man is conceptualized as a time when man ate raw flesh, and people were generally in worse health.

This Hippocratic mythology of pre-civilized life forms is not to be confused with the idea of barbarian people as they are depicted by, say, Herodotus or Thucydides. Barbarians are contemporaries of the Greeks. These contemporary barbarian people are not conceptualized as pre-civilized in any evolutionary or proto-evolutionary sense. They are not understood as people whose civilization is simply behind the times by comparison to Athens and its ultra-slick civilization (all from an Athenian point of view, of course). Such evolutionary theory made a splash in all spheres of intellectual inquiry in 19th century Europe, but is not at all meant here. The concept of a barbarian in the Athenian sense does not translate into the Hippocratic notions of pre-civilized states, but primarily into the recognition of someone's foreign origin and tongue, and in second place, if appropriate, denunciations of cruel, tyrannical or undemocratic behaviour.

This makes Sophocles' literary diseases and their frequent combination with a discourse of human bestiality, monstrosity and general human wildness that causes exclusion from society, all the more worthy of contemplation. Reading and analyzing portrayals of human brutality, monstrosity or animality is of the essence in order to understand forms of exclusion in Greek tragedy, and to understand the justificatons given for the exclusion.

Denominations such as diseased, retrogressed, wild, bestial, machinic or monstrous become characteristics of the excluded protagonist, and they are vectors of the tragic protagonist's social exclusion. Most often these discourses emerge via descriptions of disease, coupled with distaste at the protagonist's antagonistic views.

One short snippet of Aristotle deals with this issue, as Aristotle discusses the problem of human brutality. He lays out first its dual

structure as either explained by geographical remoteness from civilization and being accustomed to barbarian ways of living, or by severe illness and/or mental derangement of a civilized person which can reduce a person to a brutal state.

λέγω δὲ τὰς θηριώδεις, οἷον τὴν ἄνθρωπον ἣν λέγουσι τὰς κυούσας ἀνασχίζουσαν τὰ παιδία κατεσθίειν, ἢ οἵοις χαίρειν φασὶν ἐνίους τῶν ἀπηγριωμένων περὶ τὸν Πόντον, τοὺς μὲν ὠμοῖς τοὺς δὲ ἀνθρώπων κρέασιν, τοὺς δὲ τὰ παιδία δανείζειν ἀλλήλοις εἰς εὐωχίαν, ἢ τὸ περὶ Φάλαριν λεγόμενον. αὗται μὲν θηριώδεις, αἳ δὲ διὰ νόσους γίνονται καὶ διὰ μανίαν ἐνίοις (…) αἳ δὲ νοσηματώδεις ἢ ἐξ ἔθους, (…) τοῖς μὲν γὰρ φύσει τοῖς δ᾽ ἐξ ἔθους συμβαίνουσιν, οἷον τοῖς ὑβριζομένοις ἐκ παίδων.[13]

“I mean bestial characters, like the creature in woman's form that is said to rip up pregnant females and devour their offspring, or certain savage tribes on the coasts of the Black Sea, who are alleged to delight in raw meat or in human flesh, and others among whom each in turn provides a child for the common banquet; or the reported depravity of Phalaris. These are instances of bestiality. Other unnatural propensities are owed to disease, and sometimes to insanity (…) Other morbid propensities are acquired by habit (...). These practices result in some cases from natural disposition, and in others from accustomization, as with those who have been abused from the age of childhood”.

Aristotle's term for an ἀπηγριωμένος ἀνήρ (“the having-become-savage man”, or “wild-ified man”) is composed of the prefix ἀπο- and a participial adjective. As the word's structure already

13 *NE* 1148 b 19-31

suggests, the term encapsulates a notion of developmental dynamic. Literally, it could be translated as “having become savage away from (sc. humanity)” or “having departed towards savagery”. It is the very word Sophocles’ Philoctetes uses of himself, asking to be pitied and understood as an ἀπηγριωμένον (226) by Neoptolemus. Philoctetes highlights that he has been the victim of abuse (ὑβρίσθην, 367), which is also an explanation that Aristotle gives for such a “savage-ification” in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Immediately, it becomes difficult to keep separate the agency of the individual from the agency of the community in this "wildification" of Philoctetes: had he not suffered the abuse, the argument goes, he would not be in the state he is in. But Odysseus, Philoctetes’ visitor, does not remotely accept this explanation, instead putting forward the unacceptability of Philoctetes’ loud, unintelligible, indeed "wild" cries of pain (ἀγρίαις δυσφημίαις, 9-10) and the disturbance of their noise during the act of pouring libations to the gods. Even if Odysseus and Philoctetes disagree in the explanation of the situation, Odysseus attributing the full responsibility to Philoctetes, whereas Philoctetes highlights the agency of the community in this disaster by turning their back on him in a time of need. Philoctetes does not deny that he has deteriorated; and the disease is wild (νοσεῖ μὲν νόσον ἀγρίαν, 173). He speaks of his sickness as a wild one (ἀγρίᾳ νόσῳ, 266). Philoctetes explains that it came from the bite of a snake, a bite that was wild, once again described with the same adjective (ἐχίδνης ἀγρίῳ χαράγματι, 266-7). He contrasts his own original qualities of courage and military skill against how these qualities are wasted during his life. Philoctetes comes to be referred to as a “crude workman” (Soph. *Phil.* 35-7) because he has not at hand the necessary utensils of civilization. He eats

from a hastily crafted pot that he made himself, and uses his bow merely as a hunting instrument. On the island, there is no-one to appreciate his fine archery skills which he had perfected for the art of war.

Ajax had a similar problem and laments that his bravery has become a mockery, for it only aimed at animals instead of men, as Ajax had planned.[14]

ὁρᾷς τὸν θρασύν, τὸν εὐκάρδιον,
τὸν ἐν δαΐοις ἄτρεστον μάχας,
ἐν ἀφόβοις με θηρσὶ δεινὸν χέρας;
οἴμοι γέλωτος, οἷον ὑβρίσθην ἄρα[15]

You're looking at a valiant and brave man,
One who is intrepid in sharp battle,
See the power of my skilled hands, in midst the unfrightened beasts?
Alas for my ridicule, how I am abused.

When Ajax goes insane, he turns into something monstrous. Dangerously close to roasting human flesh or making human sacrifices, forfeiting the use of utensils in his meat-cleaving efforts, and hunting with his bare hands, he has a cyclopean air about him. The Homeric Polyphemus comes to mind, who is also called ἄγριος by his author. It is in Odysseus' narrative that the cyclops is painted as a lawless island dweller who doesn't know or honour any laws: ἄνδρ᾽ (...),/ ἄγριον, οὔτε δίκας ἐὺ εἰδότα οὔτε

14 Lawrence (2013), 108.

15 Soph.Aj.364-7 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 16)

θέμιστας (Od.9.214-5). In *Philoctetes*, is is also Odysseus who comes to visit, and the general setting of a naval visit to an uncivilized island invites this comparison with Polyphemus even more.

In *Trachiniae*, the same expression is used of Heracles (νόσον ἀγρίαν at 1030; ἀγρίαν ὀδύνην at 975). In Deianeira's opinion, the condition is the result of his reprehensibly gargantuan sex drive. This so-called wild disease first of all refers to the fact that he cheats on her, his wife. Later, it is actualized into a raging disease of skin burns, and will unleash Heracles' rage until both are confounded. The raring sickenss, the raging Heracles: it is all one.

Again glancing at Oedipus, the protagonist's incommensurate anger is described by the self-same adjective (ὀργῆς ἥτις ἀγριωτάτη, *O.T.* 344). Even in Aeschylus' *Seven*, the curse of Oedipus was directed against his sons, called the offspring of a "wild" union and mother (τέκνοις δ᾽ ἀγρίας /(...) τροφᾶς, 785-6). One more example of the word in use and its negative tint is Ajax's reference to Hector's sword. The sword is Ajax's suicide weapon. Hector's sword, we hear, was made in Hades, by a dreadful artificer (δημιουργὸς ἄγριος). Here, the quality of being ἄγριος appears as particularly sinister. Lastly, in *Antigone*, the first stasimon distinguishes markedly the περιφραδὴς ἀνήρ by contrast to the θηρῶν ἀγρίων ἔθνη. Almost anything or anyone described as ἄγριος emanates destruction, abomination, and a profound lack of all the desired attributes such as moderation, widsom, technical knowledge, or rationality. Now with this rudimentary map of the word ἄγριος in Sophocles, the term clearly conjures up a plurality of meanings. All are just the opposite of finesse, of military skill, of fine manners and civic

virtues, of orderly religious worship, of life under a jurisdiction, in short: of cultural participation.
The ἄγριος ἀνήρ is undesirable, not seen as part of a community but as a threat to it. The instances here discussed are by no means a complete list of appearances in Sophocles, and this only shows how frequently and amply the image is deployed and how central concept is to bartering identity of self and other.

Aristotle's ἀπηγριωμένος ἀνήρ is on the threshold, as the word indicates he is the man who has become that way but was not, by nature, an ἄγριος. Man's bestial character (θηριώδεις) takes this development to its final destination of belonging to a non-human, animal species. The word θηρίον not only refers to wild animals but also to monsters, such as Nessus in *Trachiniae*, Cerberus in *Oedipus Coloneus* (1568-9), or the satyrs in *Ichneutai* (221-2). Thus this state is, for Aristotle, even a degree above being a man who has "become wild".
Contracting an illness, according to Aristotle, is one way of getting there. The other way would be to have been born that way, in faraway places perhaps. The binary explanation for the existence of human bestiality states that on the one hand, bestiality could result from strange customs entropic to certain faraway places, and on the other hand, from grave illness, also potentially such (mental) illness as results from being abused. Philoctetes' Lemnian espousal and the idea that he has, like Polyneices in Argos, soaked up so much of the place's mores that he is more part of Lemnos than he was part of the Greek army. It profiles him through local legends of barbarity that the play exploits for imagery and extrinsic characterization. The concept of him being visited by Odysseus on an adventure quest like in the

Odyssey, as mentioned, pushes Philoctetes further into the category of monsters, by the similarity that this scenario conveys. However, there is a difference between such a narrative where opponents of Odysseus are fantasmagoric monsters, and one like this where it is a human man who has fallen ill. Sophocles' tragedies only very seldom take exaggeration as far as to stray into the domain of the fantastical. The *Odyssey* incorporates fantastical or supernatural events such as transformation (men to swine; Odysseus into an old man, and back; Proteus etc.), meetings with the dead in the underworld, hybrid life forms and unreal places.

If we wanted to establish a relation between modern ideas of "wild men" and "sick men" (or "insane women") as they have been received and studied by former scholars of Sophocles, we are obliged to reach deep into the history of ideas and classical scholarship, from at least the colonial age, and since. What could possibly be gained from this? One might start by contemplating what we might lose, and it might surprise that we can lose Dionysus. It pays to take a step back from the fraught language of so-called ritualist scholarship, from terminologies that were evolved in an age that has passed, when anthropology was in its infancy in the heyday of colonialism and the beginnings of social Darwinism. Many of the underlying ideas and socio-cultural terminologies that nurtured and underpinned the ritualist interpretation of tragedy which have since been deconstructed.[16]

I will explain: there is no space here for yet another history of the classical scholarship on Sophocles,[17] it would simply be as a

16 See Goff & Simpson (2007); Wylie (2009), 106.

17 For a fairly recent and thorough recapitulation, see Goldhill & Hall (2009), 1-24.

reminder of how closely the history of Sophoclean scholarship has always shadowed the history of ideas. Historically, the discussion of Greek tragedy has been closely entangled with the discipline of anthropology. As late as 1945, in a report on classical education in the British colonies, which Barbara Goff has analyzed, readers are informed that “the African can teach the European, specifically about the classical heritage of the latter". We can easily relate this to early 20th century classicist and anthropologist Frazer's (then ground-breaking) conviction that Greek and Roman rituals had unmissable resemblances to ceremonies that colonial explorers had written about having observed on their visits to the so-called savages from overseas.[18] These anthropological narratives of the colonial age cast a long shadow on the interpretation of Greek tragedy in the first half of the 20th century.

Those very characterizations and descriptions of so-called savages, composed by colonial explorers and anthropologists, were themselves loaded with tropes of European fiction. How does this work? The European arsenal of fictions and fairytale features a vast collection of wild men, ogres and witches, who live in the woods, eat children, use strange magic, etc.. These narratives repose on medieval folklore and also rework ancient myths of ogres and wild men like the Homeric Polyphemus. Polyphemus himself has literary forefathers in legends older than the *Odyssey* and in oral culture.

The wild man in European fiction, the wild man and the monster in ancient Greece, wildness and irrationality in scholarship on tragedy, the abject brute of modernist fiction and social discourse in metropolitan Europe: again and again, the trope re-appears, and new examples rework an ancient image. In each case, the image

18 Ackermann (2002), 48.

of this person represents the undesired and undesirable in society. It is the embodiment of an excluded identity.

Fictions and myths surrounding this character typology extend back all the way to the dawn of time. More than provide a discussion of appropriate length, we can briefly contour the two-way process, in which the trope of the wild man from European folk tale fed into the colonial encounter with indigenous people and the written accounts anthropologists. Themselves invested with European fiction, these anthropological reports fed back into the reading of ancient myth and drama.

One mirror double of the colonial "wild man" in the modernist metropolis was the urban abject brute, or insane criminal, of the industrial underclass. This domestic variant of the wild man was studied by criminologists who dissected the brains of criminals and made plaster casts of their facial features. The hope was to stumble upon some kind of congenital defect in their brain that would allow scientists to classify the criminal's physiognomy as biologically different from that of the upstanding citizen. Described in medical textbooks and studied in early psychiatric literature, this stylization of a character type is embodied by the homeless, unemployed, by drunkards and inmates of the insane asylum: the Victorian era's “undesirables”. This configuration of a domestic “wild man” had an influence on readings of Sophocles in the very early 20th century, as we will briefly now contemplate.

Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s *Elektra* is one particularly rich example of a reception which amalgamates the modernist trope of the urban “wild man” or rather, as the case may be, his cognate the “insane woman”, with the Sophoclean portrayal of a painfully marginalized and ostracized Electra.

We will turn to this reception of *Electra* in a moment after first making a brief return upon the discussion of colonialism's influence on the ritualist interpretation of tragedy. Admittedly, this is a lot of conceptual zigzagging between contexts. I hope to suggest that the contexts are all related. Conceptually, all these components are needed to begin to see how social exclusion works in Sophocles, and how and why scholars from the past times have approached the issue.

In the first wave of the ritualist interpretation of Greek tragedy, Harrison and Frazer gave currency to the very thought of the ancient Greek tragic festivals as quintessentially wild affairs—certainly an iconoclastic contrast if one thinks of early 19th century readings that praised the refinement, aesthetic balance and self-control propagated by the texts.[19] The readings of this school of scholarship capitalized upon Nietzsche's concept of the dionysiac. The construction of an intellectual genealogy with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* as the founding text of ritualistic interpretation is chronicled and critiqued by Friedrich,[20] on the basis that Nietzsche's concepts of the apollonian and the dionysiac in the *Birth of Tragedy* are highly speculative. By contrast, the premise of the first wave of ritualistic interpretation of tragedy takes the Dionysiac for a practical, indeed institutionalized, concept ready for application in anthropological readings of Greek drama.[21] What is more, Silk has highlighted that, although Nietzsche wrote *BT* in 1872, the work and its author were largely ignored by classical scholars for several decades, making

19 Konaris (2010), 499.

20 Friedrich (1996), 259.

21 Friedrich (2000), 119.

retrospective attributions of influence not that plausible.[22] At any rate, the modernist era keenly absorbed the ritualist view of Greek tragedy;[23] Dionysus remains a central preoccupation in the scholarship on tragedy well into the 20th century. Irrationality is at the center of important mid-century inquests (Dodds 1951; Vernant 1966). Here, the study of Greek ritual and guilt is cross-pollinated with psychology and psychoanalytic theory and anthropology. Within the context of theoretical structuralism and structuralist anthropology, Burkert (1966) argued for tragedy as enacting rituals and falling into patterns of initiation. At the close of the 20th century, Friedrich spoke of the "New Ritualism of Richard Seaford",[24] sparked by Seaford's 1996 *Bacchae* commentary, itself premised upon Dodds' 1960 one.

Segal (1983) proposed the concept of a “megatext” of Greek myths, meaning that seeing as the same fictions or myths were shared by many Greek writers. Segal conceptualized a single source of inspiration in society's collective consciousness. Scullion later outlined the obvious shortfalls that such a syncretic reading suffers.[25]

Despite the huge importance of Dionysus as a concept in the scholarship on tragedy, for the present study of social exclusion and in order better to contour this simple, and yet so complex theme, it becomes necessary to inspect our received notions of rationality and irrationality as these appear in the scholarship on tragedy. In particular, it becomes important to disentangle the conglomerate of received notions such as wildness, mental illness,

22 Silk & Stern (1983), 126-8.

23 Ackermann (1998), 133.

24 Friedrich (2000), 115.

25 Scullion (2002), 102ff.

disease as a literary theme, disease as a metaphor, *hamartia*, inherited guilt, issues of gender and social performativity.

3. Homo sylvaticus: paradigms of social exclusion

The wild and violent irrationalism is a fiction of dramatic discourse, and it is a standard of literary characterization. It presents itself in numerous myths and legends. One of its archetypes is the Homeric Polyphemus. This character is brought up and discussed not only as a literary figure and character trope, but also as a social construct in his own right. The "wild man", or *homo sylvaticus* (in literary criticism), spans an arc from Polyphemus in the *Odyssey* and its antecedents in older folktale, down into the modern villains of naturalist fiction and horror film. The sylvan cannibal ogre has wide currency in medieval folklore,[26] variously termed *homo sylvaticus*, *sylvestris*, or *agrestis* across traditions of criticism.[27] The character is defined by his gigantic, or sometimes miniature, size, physical deformity, or mental characteristics such as a propensity to gratuitous violence, lack of cultural refinement, and a remote location in space from the heart of the community. Scholars whose work sets out to deconstruct the notion of a *homo sylvaticus* have analyzed how the term implies a diametrical opposition to city-dwelling, civil life, gentility or civilization. The wild man's supposed bestiality in medieval romance for instance, as argues Sanchez-Marti, personifies the uncivilized antagonist, and at the same time it gives a tangible appearance to the forces that threaten society.[28] Spenser's Hairy Carl is another example of a reception of the cyclops. According to Brumble, the assocation with Polyphemus

26 Medieval literature examples in Yamamoto (2000), esp.169-96.

27 Comprehensive study by Bartra (1994).

28 Sanchez-Marti (2006), 644.

served to underscore the idea that literary cyclopes exemplified all the worst and most brutish tendencies of mankind, like a frightening potential that was dormant in all men.[29]

Scholarly interest in the study of folktale from several cultures (dubbed “Indo-European”, or “international” folktale) flares up during the mid- to late 19th century. The brothers Grimm famously gathered and documented many local folk tales, rehabilitating them as study material to be taken seriously by erudite scholars. W. Grimm’s essay on the story of Odysseus and the cyclops was to be the first systematic study of an "international folktale from modern tradition together with its ancient counterpart”.[30] This 1857 inaugural academy address focuses on Polyphemus as a character appearing and re-appearing in folk legends of various places and times. From Homer to the middle French *Dolopathos*, via Arabic and central European and Scandinavian folktale material, Jacob Grimm documents the appearance of Polyphemus-like figures in the legends of several distinct cultures. Despite a few discrepancies, he argues, essential structural similarities are recognizable again and again : the man-eating, gigantic, deformed character living in a remote place, the hero's victory by ruse, the act of blinding the ogre in order to escape, all these elements appear to be shared between eight examples of distinct local legends. Grimm summarizes the plot as the story of good, innocent youths out on adventure, who end up lost in a dark forest. Unable to find their way out, they are assaulted by hostile trolls, but in the face of this attack they use their intelligence and skill and manage to topple the monsters.[31]

29 Brumble (1998), 89.

30 Hansen (1997), 275-6.

31 Grimm (1857), 28.

Monstrous beings such as this ogre, Grimm and other scholars recognized, are standard fixtures in the imaginarium of several distinct and seemingly contact-less cultures. Hansen has summarized the broader scholarly trend of how the "Märchenjäger" (sniffers of fairy-tales) sought to establish the idea of folktale as international, in other words, that folktales could be similar or practically exactly the same from place to place. They identified a set of recurring plot patterns and personages, with the ultimate aim to draw an arc between modern and ancient fictions.[32] If Polyphemus is located on a remote island in Homeric epic, other comparable ogres dwell deep in the forest, in places equally distant from the community's familiar confines. The ogre of the *Dolopathos* for instance, lives deep in the forest. The fabled ogres are understood consistently to live in remote, uncharted territories, or uncivilized hinterlands.[33]

From medieval fiction and reaching into the anthropological thought of the 19th-century and the age of colonial empires, this typology of *homo sylvaticus* becomes the vehicle for portrayals and conceptualizations of indigenous populations in colonized regions. By the colonial age, as Bartra argues, the myth of a wild man was so well-ingrained in both European folklore and intellectual thought, that it preceded and pre-modulated the reaction of European colonizers and explorers on meeting the real peoples overseas.[34] Christian missionary societies and anthropological societies popularized the idea that African people were especially sexually unbridled. Much could be said, and has indeed been said, analysing the uses of the *homo sylvaticus*

32 Hansen (1997), 276.

33 Kim (2013), 27.

34 Bartra (1994), 1.

concept in a colonial context.[35] The print media of the era did their part in consolidating the character profile and official image of the 'exotic primitive': a tall black man with gargantuan libido, gormless grin with sparkling white teeth, a mixture of a predatory animal and an innocent wild child.[36] This "exotic primitive" concept can be retraced as an extension of, and elaboration upon, early modern European homo sylvaticus myth, and ultimately the Homeric Polyphemus as we have just sketched his literary paternity over many such specimens. For Bartra, the myth of the gentle giant or the kind-natured savage man stems from a variant of the medieval *homo sylvaticus*, which is itself at its inception informed by Greco-Roman legends of satyrs, fauns and other comical but brutish, semi-bestial figures. As Bartra argues, it is conceivable that ancient mythologies lived on in medieval folklore through popular stories and beliefs, legends and fictions. These were eventually passed into the much more erudite literary prose of writers such as Montaigne.[37] In French letters, the idea was critiqued by writers such as Voltaire or Diderot who condemned the abusive and unfounded power-play involved in racism and slavery, pre-empting books like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* delving into the atrocities of colonial exploitation. Yet, in the late 19th-century the idea of a *homo sylvaticus* is more and more understood as a biological reality, and enters the discourse of modern medicine, underscored by arguments from the contemporaneously nascent theory of evolution.

Hall draws up another history of how the Cyclops of the *Odyssey*, many centuries after his original appearance in Homer, came to be

35 Goff (2013), 43.

36 Gerstner (2007), 25-26.

37 Bartra (1997), 28.

cast in his generic role as the original man-eater, as the yardstick of abomination described by colonial explorers. Columbus writes of the Caribbean people of Caniba that they were dreadful cannibals—and had only one eye, as Hall highlights: "the Cyclops then flourished during the great age of teratology, when malformed individuals were studied and feted".[38] Just as an example, in the medical history museum in Berlin, a malformed embryo with only one eye in the centre of his forehead is conserved and labelled “Cyclops”. The diagnoser obviously knew about Polyphemus. In pair with the contemplation of morbid anatomies comes the idea of morbid entertainment and opportunity for spectacle inherent in morbid bodies. Quite aside from the era’s love of "freak shows", in the 19th-century, doctors operated in operating theatres, crowded with students and sightseers. This was surely jus an organic part of the medical profession's growth into an academic discipline in the infancy of the polytechnic university. At the same time, the practice acknowledges the power of morbid fascination, the power of medical symptoms and their treatment to enrapture audiences. The spectator of an operation can empathize with the patient, but the true pain of both operation and illness is only suffered by that patient. What is more, the social stigma of the disease in question, and the embarrassment of being in a public operating theatre, is only borne by the patient. The spectator can inspect the symptoms of illnesses that have or give their sufferer a bad reputation (let’s say venereal diseases or alcoholism) and their less-than-glamorous cure. Vicariously experiencing a disease and its amputation, certainly has vulgar, voyeuristic undertones (or overtones, depending). The guilty nature of this pleasure therefore

38 Hall (2008), 61.

becomes sublimated in the assertion that the suffering of the patient is, of course, allegorical of much deeper and more universal truths. One supposes that the Thucydidean description of pestilence is beguiling to readers because it is realistic, and yet it is only acceptable to be beguiled by it if one acknowledges the literary symbolism thinly veiled behind it. The show of the sick Heracles, or Ajax, can claim to be metaphorical, to signify far greater things than just itself, but it also takes advantage of the in-built fears and dark fascinations that disease commands. There is a lot of potential for spectacle in diseased bodies, and in the idea of mental derangement.

Epigraphic evidence tells us that Sophocles was the founder of the cult of Asclepius in Athens.[39] The man Sophocles may or may not have dedicated vast chunks of his time to the study or practice of medicine, but his literary theme-weaving of disease into all manner of plots is undisputed.[40] Sophocles used disease and its associated imagery in order to further a variety of plot lines along. To read representations of extreme disease and of mad rages only on a surface level, would mean to fall prey to the baser instincts of sensationalism and morbid fascination, and this is exactly what the conceptualization of disease as metaphor sets out to transcend and de-vulgarize.

Plays such as *Philoctetes* and *Trachiniae*, where symptomatologies are viscerally unfolded at the foreground of the action, have repulsed many scholars in times of old. This sentiment even prevented many from studying these plays.[41] Postmodern scholars have muscled in all the more, appreciating

39 See Mitchell-Boyask (2007), 86ff.

40 See the discussion on the diseased body in Krück (2011) 59-60.

41 Budelmann (2007), 452.

the symbolic power of disease in Sophocles, and unpicking the construction of bestiality as a concept, the concept's antithetical relation to civilization, and the politicized definition of civilization in the first place.[42] Illness, infection, physical deformity and insanity play an important role in the becoming savage or 'bestialization' of several canonical protagonists in the discourse of Sophocles, and so too in Sophoclean receptions. In the Victorian age it was far less acceptable to think about how aristocratic characters, perchance taken ill or driven mad by circumstance, had in them the potential to become bestial, to join the ranks of so-called degenerate paupers in lunatic asylums, and so forth. The novel *La bête humaine* almost cost Emile Zola his seat in the French Academy, deemed on a par with the entertainment of Paris' amoral Grand Guignol theater, which specialized in plebeian shows of gratuitous violence. These kinds of entertainment officially had no place in gentlemanly taste, where, by contrast, Homer and the tragedians sat in pride of place. Or perhaps, even they did not quite: the original *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles was banned from the British stage for decades until 1910, simply because it contains scenes of remembered incest. *Oedipus Tyrannus* had been performed as a Cambridge Greek play in 1887, but professional productions were not allowed.[43] Finally in 1910, Murray commissioned a new translation and used his connections to the political elite to challenge the censorship of Oedipus on the British stage. Lord Chamberlain's committee had in fact come to understand Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* as a play revolving predominantly

42 See the bibliographical note on Sophocles and medical language in Allan (2014), 259, n.2.

43 Bloom (2007), 19.

around incest, and the censor would not allow such a lewd theme to be propagated in theatres and music halls.[44] The debate about censorship would become excessively lengthy riddled with press scandals. As Bloom argues, the two most-discussed and censored pieces of the decade were Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* and Shelley's horror drama *The Cenci*,[45] an unlikely coupling, but one which would link Sophocles' *Oedipus* with the horror genre for a long time. Now that we have arrived at the British stage, we will zoom in on the reception of a 1909 *Electra* performance in London which caused similar ripples of shock in the establishment (resisting the temptation, unlike contemporary journalists, to write that this Electra "electrified" the audience).

44 Macintosh (1997), 295.

45 Bloom (2007), 20-22.

4. One reception: a modern Electra, a modern exclusion

In the early 21st century, the study of Sophoclean drama has taken a turn towards performance studies, reception studies, and a parallel branch of historical and politico-historical scholarship continues to flourish (Ahrensdorf 2009, Badger 2013). Sewell-Rutter wrote in a recent review that the study of theatre performance could complement (rather than replace) literary-focused readings of tragic texts.[46] I would venture to put this more strongly, in that the study of modern receptions of the classics can reflect back on our own readings of these texts in fundamental ways. A strong example is Freud's Oedipus complex, which the majority of students know before they ever come to read *Oedipus Tyrannus* by Sophocles. Thus, Freud's reception precedes a reading of the Sophoclean play, and sets up expectations for the reading, and one might estimate that at least 50% of readers of Sophocles know of the Freudian Oedipus before they meet the Sophoclean one. Contemplating how ancient dramas have been received within the context of a past, but modern Zeitgeist, helps us first of all to understand how much our own understanding of the ancient plays must be conditioned by our own mental conditioning. Production and conditioning of knowledge are in perpetual flow, and thus every year and every decade might see a fresh Oedipus. There are hundreds and thousands of ways of looking at Oedipus, and hundreds and thousands of ways of seeing Oedipus. To look into the reception of an ancient play by a modern audience, even a dated modern audience, or to look into

46 Sewell-Rutter (2015), *BMCR* 2015.10.06.

the history of scholarship, is simultaneously to interrogate ourselves about why certain topics, characters or themes are judged differently by us today than they were 10, 50 or 100 years ago. It forces us to acknowledge how much our understanding is conditioned, and to be better scholars by knowing our situation.

The London premiere of Strauss' *Elektra* (1909) exemplifies what I mean. Here, the modern trope of the hysteric woman is superimposed upon Elektra,[47] who emerges on stage as obsessed and debilitated in accordance with Freudian diagnostic portrayals. So entrapped is she in a web of sombre thoughts that her entourage finds her reduced to just a few repetitive behaviours. She is animal-like, "giftig wie eine wilde Katze"[48] towards the servants. The royal couple demotes Elektra to the role of dog, and starts feeding her raw meat from troughs on the floor, lumping her together with the dogs. Once a beloved royal daughter, Elektra will now be chained to a wall and starved by Klytaimnestra. Klytaimnestra has already succeeded in making Orest go insane by using a similar tactic: "sie gaben/ ihm eine schlechte Wohnung und die Tiere/ des Hofes zur Gesellschaft".[49] A degenerative development is imputed to Orest, away from his former princely and civilized status, and into madness. In Klytaimnestra's narrative, this insanity results from prolonged withdrawal of cultural refinements, from constant exposure to the contact with animals. In Sophocles' *Electra*, there is mention of a dark dungeon where Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus intend to throw Electra

47 To distinguish between *Electra* by Sophocles and *Elektra* by Strauss/Hofmannsthal, the spelling with "c" is used of Sophocles' play and the spelling with "k" is used of the opera. The same goes with names of Clytaemnestra/Klytaimnestra, Orestes/Orest, Electra/Elektra.

48 Hofmannsthal (2013), 4.

49 Hofmannsthal (2013), 25.

(Soph. El. 379-82). In Hofmannsthal's text, this dark place is more specifically in a tower, perhaps with reference to the notorious Viennese mental institution, the Narrenturm ("tower of fools").[50] Mention of foam at Elektra's mouth leaves one wondering if these could be symptoms of epilepsy.[51] An ill-understood condition for a long time, epilepsy was harshly stigmatized in the middle 19th and early 20th centuries,[52] and one might well envision this Elektra like the portrait of an epileptic in a lunatic asylum. As Goldhill analyzed from press reviews of the show, the connection with mental illness did not fail to impress audiences, for its portrayal conveyed the very danger of this conceptualization.[53] Goldhill draws attention to contemporary publications by the French psychiatrist Charcot, whose investigations into hypnotism on hysteria appeared in a novelty textbook edition that was illustrated by photographs.[54] The then ultra-modern use of photography in a medical textbook, on the one hand, purported to offer documentation with unprecedented accuracy, for photographs do not lie. On the other hand, photographs very well do lie, but it is conceivable that fewer people realized this at the time. The choice of medium was itself spectacular, and the photographs honour the traditional iconography of madness as a spectacular condition for humans to be in.

Long-ingrained in the medical discourse of insanity is the thought that insanity manifests itself outwardly by facial expressions and body poses of a bestial character. It impinges clearly for instance

50 Beller (2012), 33.

51 Hofmannsthal (2013), 5.

52 Heimböckel (2009), 418.

53 Goldhill (2002), 131.

54 Goetz, Bonduelle & Gelfand (1995), 78ff.

through Bell's medical descriptions of the insane as "reduced to the state of brutality".[55] For Bell, the best way to study their condition is to set their behaviours and facial expressions in parallel with the mannerisms of animals. In all, for that particular era in the history of psychiatry and the production of medical textbooks, comparison with the appearance and behaviour of feral beasts is a frequent trope that dominates portrayals of madness and its sufferers.

One may wonder why this image was especially powerful in that time, and look for clues in its broader intellectual and social context of that historical period and its society. Rosa Luxemburg wrote polemically in 1912 of the need to realize that inmates of asylums, vagrants and prostitutes needed to be considered a part of society, instead of being considered as something alien, foreign, and far removed from the real society.[56] Luxemburg's argument taps into the fear of human decrepitude, and the desire to set oneself apart and be safe from these unsavoury forms of life. This kind of thinking is at the inception of discourses of mutual exclusivity and the segregation of identities. Underscoring society's mendacious rhetoric of economic prosperity and cultural advancement, Luxemburg comments that beneath appearances of marvelous civilization lies a terrible abyss of bestiality and barbarism in the image of Dante's Inferno.[57] Luxemburg's dichotomy accuses the mutual exclusivity set up between the glittering world of technical progress and the squalor at the lower tiers, among the industrial workforce and in the institutions of welfare, like the workhouse. In Germany, England, and all over

55 Gilman (1981), 61-2.

56 Luxemburg (1987), 150.

57 Luxemburg (1987), 150.

the industrialized nations of Europe, workhouses were receptacles for the homeless, sick and destitute, and fecund soil for Dickensian portrayal. Bentham's Panopticon prison architecture was commissioned for English workhouses, a design that spoke of social hygiene and surveillance. Windowless surrounding walls honored the presumed desire to shield the inmates from public shame, and to an even stronger degree these walls shielded the public from looking in at the display of human decay inside. The workhouse had a pendant institution, the lunatic asylum. An increasing proportion of workhouse residents was regarded as insane and placed in asylums.[58] Circa one third of all workhouse residents were never discharged back into society, but into lunatic asylums,[59] where they spent the rest of their lives. Asylums and workhouses in European industrialized cities appeared like isolated bubbles of no-man's-land at the heart of urbanized society. As un-places for un-people, they were foreclosed from view like a deliberate blind spot in the public eye; in New York City, the buildings for asylums, prisons, hospitals and orphanages were even erected on dedicated islands, recently termed "islands of the undesirables" by Lovejoy,[60] still further out of sight: a sort of modern re-enactment of the *Philoctetes*-scenario. Closed asylums within the confines of urban metropoles enact the idea that one can be excluded from a city without leaving the city, more like the Electra in *Electra*.

This very broad background sketch can help us why and how Hofmannsthal's *Elektra* was able to horrify its audience so much.

58 Cherry (2003), 10-11.

59 Higginbotham (2012), Appendix A.

60 Lovejoy (2015), goo.gl/Mn44ZS

Her story collapses the well-guarded social barriers between aristocrat and asylum inmate. She jumps ship, from royal daughter to incoherent and unkempt pauper woman. That even a royal daughter could revert to an animal state and be so reviled by her own family as to become more alike to a destitute pauper in the asylum than a princess, implies that ultimately there is no biological difference between rich and poor. Even she is not immune from the claws of epilepsy, insanity, and its power to take away her social place and privilege. It is a narrative that challenges the idea that all this asylum business has nothing to do, never will have anything to do, with the upper tiers of society. It chips away at a bourgeois sense of the healthy and robust self as demarcated from an underclass that is biologically less evolved.

The problem with this transformation is not that it is shocking, but that it is untrue. Elektra has moved into a new state of being, she is so sick that she seems to be an animal to her estranged mother and household servants. Yet, it is incumbent upon readers to acknowledge that the transformation of Elektra into a wild animal is an invention of her entourage. For, if we look at her, Elektra has not *really* turned into any animal, it is only that her public perception as one has been switched on, and the switch cannot be flipped back. As soon as this switch happens, her invisible safety net of propriety disappears, the invisible barrier of assurance crumbles that separates the upper from the lower classes, of which Elektra had until now enjoyed the privileges. That even a woman of the aristocracy can be allowed to sink as low as this Elektra, this perhaps most of all explains why *Elektra* in London caused a press scandal. The opera polarized opinions, for it dramatized a degenerative transformation of an aristocratic body into one of those abject-looking paupers whose existence was systematically

hidden from public view, whose condition was stylized into horrific and sub-human portrayals in psychiatric textbooks with photographic illustrations worthy of a horror film.

Foucault critiqued the modern insane asylum and its founding principles, for in its origins in Christian charity, the asylum came prepackaged with concepts of disease as a punishment for sins. It thus entered the early welfare state as an institution that understood itself to be a place of medical care but also redemption from sin. For Foucault, this cemented the bond between insanity and guilt, or as he terms it "unreasonableness and guilt" (he uses the word “déraison”).[61] Foucault clamped together insanity and "unreasonableness", the prime crime of which many tragic protagonists are accused. For instance in *Electra* or *Antigone*, unreasonable ideas (or ideas that are deemed to be unreasonable by one of the parties) are conceptualized as diseases, while reasonable thinking comes out as the healthy kind of thinking. But in Foucault's argument, there is not only mention of unreasonable thinking being similar to a disease, like it is in Sophocles' *Antigone*; here also the biological or medicalized aspect of insanity comes into view, which in the 19th century is underwritten by a whole discourse of class, genetics and heredity. Insanity, conceptualized as a disease, and the guilt attached to the wrongdoings of insanity emerges as the ideology behind the institution of asylums as places of redemption. Biological make-up and moral guilt are strung together so tightly that they become indistinguishable. Hofmannsthal's version of Elektra, then, embodies a kind of retrogression to a crazy, confused and bestial state, much like Stevenson's Mr. Hyde who jumps out of Dr. Jekyll as the improbable and "troglodytic" embodiment of the

61 Foucault (1972), 100.

gentleman's basest passions. Elektra seems possessed by some kind of shamanistic credence, as she drags the dead Agamemnon behind her all through the house, conversing with him. His face appears to have an uncanny ability to continue to see the events taking place in the house, even though he is already dead : "Dein Auge,/ das starre, offne, sah herein ins Haus",[62] sings Elektra. Freud had argued that the attribution of lifelike qualities to dead or inanimate objects and vice versa is one of the core vehicles of the uncanny sensation.[63] Elektra appears to be entering an atavistic form of belief, speaking to her father like a shamanistic medium. She is herself half-dead, haunted and haunting appearance uncanny to behold. Freud will draw the equivocation between mental insanity and so-called primitive wildness again three decades later in London when he writes of those among his patients—the neurotics—whose psychic life strikes him as closely resembling the soul of "primitive savages", in that both share atavistic and irrational credences.[64]

Mental derangement as horror entertainment is intensely exploited through the late modern era's big city tales of man's unravelling, that smacked of psychiatric or venereal symptomatology. This was a close cognate of the *homo selvaticus* imagery of ogres and wild men, in multiplex ways. By a medcalized discourse of disease and diseases of civilization, tapping into colonial tropes of the supposed savages from overseas, and reaching back to imagery drawn from ogre fables as old as the middle ages and beyond. In Hofmannsthal's libretto, Elektra's character profile accrues a variety of insinuations of mental morbidity, from

62 Hofmannsthal, 15.

63 Freud (2013), 20.

64 Freud (1956), 7.

unhealthy fixations, demonic possession, to epileptic fitfulness and other forms of impenetrably erratic behaviour. She and Orest are re-conceptualized as stray animals, dogs or cats, unkempt like shaggy beasts flashing their teeth in aggression. The entertainment potential of the morbid body as a spectacle reveals itself once again, underscored by the period's public interest in the natural sciences, medicine, morbid anatomy and mental derangement. Salacious enthusiasm is dedicated, for instance, to the true or half-true tales of criminality amongst the urban poor, London's legend of Jack the Ripper being a particularly well remembered case. Many fictions in this era illustrate this idea, premised on the idea that disease or psychopathology lead to criminality, and the theory that man's biological evolution could not only progress to improve, but also to deteriorate. Examples are Stevenson's Mr. Hyde, called "troglodytic" to convey his affinity with the prehistoric caveman, or Zola's Jacques Lantier, the compulsive homicide and offspring of a destitute alcoholic, whose genetically tarnished character ineluctably compels him to murder innocent women out of an ancient lust for revenge (*La bête humaine*). Here, *Elektra* finds a place among among child-strangling madmen on the run from the asylum, alcoholic wife-murderers, syphilitic prostitutes. The figure falls in with a host literary figures alive in German expressionist fiction that personified society's worst nightmares, all whom society wanted to see locked up, or better still, not see at all.

This reception history is more than one hundred years old. Yet it is important for the present investigation, for two reasons. One is that 19th century institutions are the spiritual cradle of today's concept of a welfare state, which is the natural environment in

which any modern debate on social exclusion takes place. For instance, modern think tanks seek to elucidate the issue of social exclusion by focusing on estate blocks with high numbers of welfare recipients and high criminality rates. Policies designed to diminish social exclusion are inscribed in a wider web of discourse on citizen welfare, and citizen participation. From the age of the industrial revolution, today's society and especially today's policy-makers have absorbed and propagate the idea that the definition of normal is first and foremost someone who works, who participates in society's mode of production. The 19th century institutions for the poor, the unemployed, homeless, the insane and other marginalized groups or types of personalities may be a far cry from today's correspondent institutions, and bear other names. But today's welfare institutions—which are often policies rather than physical places—are still the progeniture of these older forebears. The norms of social discourse, the norms according to which exclusion can take place, are defined primarily by the idea that a normal person is a person who works. The elderly, the unemployed, the sick, the disabled who do not work, these are prominent groups which come into view in discussions of social exclusion. Inclusion in society—or rather, inclusion within the parameters of a discourse of society—hinges on being an active member of the workforce, and this has remained unchanged since the early days of industrialization. We understand that the idea of participation and exclusion hinges on the society's mode of production. The applicability of social exclusion as a concept for ancient Greek tragedy requires us to transpose the dichotomy between participation and exclusion, to an ancient Greek context. In the heyday of Greek tragedy, Athens wages several long and difficult wars, experiences civil war, and on top of this is

beleaguered by vicious epidemics. That Philoctetes and Ajax both find themselves excluded from the army means that they no longer participate in military efforts. In one sense, one might say that they have stopped their production of military contributions, and also stopped their production of their own military identity, like the man in Archilochus's 'Shield Poem' who leaves his shield in a bush and does not care for it any more.

5. Identity and exclusion in Sophocles

Ajax has stopped being a soldier out of spite, and the very minute he stops catering to this military identity, he is socially dissociated and excluded. Philoctetes falls ill and equally stops 'producing' military services and is from then on excluded. Deianeira is excluded from the group of young virgins, with whom she speaks. She no longer performs the role of an eligible young woman, but equally, she has finished with her wifehood to Heracles. For this reason, Deianeira does no longer produce anything, not perform any specific function. She is a singular, excluded character on the set of Trachis where no-one really understands her. Her husband Heracles will not fare substantially better. His work in the wild country where he combats monsters and where he will fall prey to a shriveling poison compounded by the Hydra's blood and mixed by the hand of the centaur turns him from isolated superman into an abject creature in the court of monsters. In this way, Heracles will be excluded from the entirety of humankind. The same goes for Tereus and Procne, who are transformed into birds as a result of their supremely horrid actions, that make them lose their place in the community of humans. Electra and Orestes are excluded from the house of Aegisthus, because they do not perform their social roles as prince and princess in this new royal household, which they do not recognize as such. Failing to produce the affirmation of this new order, Orestes is sent into exile, while Electra is given the option to stay, but shrivels on the outdoors, for she does not enter into her role and remains stuck in limbo for a time. As a result, there is talk of locking her away into a dungeon of the palace. Oedipus goes through a number of stages, for he is a

Theban who does not realize that he is a Theban. He is at first integrated into Thebes in his capacity as a riddle-solver who rid the town of an epidemic disease, but will be excluded once again when the epidemic raises its head again, and it is understood that he is no longer performing this sanitary service to the town, quite the opposite. Although the drama of his realization of his own incest is more central than the sub-plot of the plague at Thebes and Oedipus' role in keeping it checked, it is actually the fact that citizens are once again falling ill that hurries Tiresias into telling Oedipus that he is the culprit of the crime he is investigating and thus precipitates the terrible realization of who he really is.[65]

These descriptions of social exclusion only offer a few rudimentary categories, but what is clear is that these exclusions practically all result from a change in identity and social role. In no case are we dealing with the exclusion of someone who simply is an outsider as he always was. We are dealing with issues of identity, self-identification, dis-identification, change and re-assignment of identity within a set, performed either or both by self and/or others.

Each observable exclusion scenario has a gradual transformation process at its heart. The exclusion from humankind altogether, best exemplified by the story of Tereus and Procne, is the most drastic form of exclusion. The threat of exclusion from humankind at large is latent in Sophocles' portrayals of exclusion from various sets or sub-sets of society (familial home, army, etc.). As I will argue, imagery and literary tropes of bestiality and monstrosity are attached to nearly all excluded characters in Sophocles, even if they do not portray an animal transformation

65 On the relation of the plague scenario to characterization of Oedipus, see also Meinel (2015), 53-4.

directly. For instance, undertones of an exclusion from human society underwrite much of the discourse of disease in *Philoctetes*, tending towards a discourse of bestiality instead of disease. There are many patterns and micro-patterns relating to social exclusion in Sophocles, such as de-humanizing profiling based on ill health, animal-like profiling based on sexual characteristics, the discourse of rationality versus irrationality used as an argumentative weapon, where the concept of wildness plays out in deprecatory characterization.

Identities are created and are used all the time in order to warrant inclusion or exclusion from groups, towns, armies, even human society at large. Affirmation of a certain identity, especially a collective identity, is a classic instrument of persuasion in rhetorical speeches of every kind, from the ancient court room to modern immigration politics. Identity can be a weapon, apt to make certain others invisible; and a loss of identity, or lack of a clearly defined one, becomes a predictor for exclusion. Important studies have certainly placed contemporaneous Athenian court debates in parallel to the events unfolding in the plays (Loraux 1986; Scodel 2006; Chanter 2011), but in complement to this, it has to be considered that the legal framework is not fit to provide the whole explanation for the events related by Greek tragic texts. The first supporter of this view is Aristotle, who notes early on in the *Poetics* that murder among friends is particularly suited for tragedy, which works best at achieving the greatest fear and pity when it deals with ill-doing and disaster within family or close friends circles. Moving forward to the exposition of character and thought in tragedy which often has been reduced to the final conclusion that "character is destiny", Aristotle argues that in tragedy, [πέφυκεν αἴτια δύο τῶν πράξεων εἶναι, διάνοια καὶ

ἦθος] καὶ κατὰ ταύτας καὶ τυγχάνουσι καὶ ἀποτυγχάνουσι πάντες.[66] In short, διάνοια and ἦθος are "the dual origin of deeds, and according to them, every one fares well or ill – so the story line (plot) is in fact the representation of deeds". There are two types of proof in the *Rhetorics*, ἄτεχνοί and ἔντεχνοι the former are mostly empiric, they adduce legal or testimonial evidence; the ἔντεχνοι by contrast are the artifice of the speaker, thought up in accordance with their personality, or character. Artificial proofs are thus automatically "ethical" (i.e. belonging to the ἦθος who makes them).[67] "It is the entechnos quality of the way that arguments and actions are thought to progress in drama, which warrants that dialectical technique can understand every thought and action from a character based on the understanding of this character's identity, and especially, his self-coherence",[68] writes Katherine Eden, glowingly highlighting the profound unacceptability of change implied in Aristotle's idea of character and identity. This is precisely the sore point of those tragic protagonists who make the journey from inclusion to exclusion.

With this in mind, we can easily understand Philoctetes' keen zeal to tell Neoptolemus exactly who he is, and appreciate the great injury Odysseus could inflict on Philoctetes by investing all his argumentative finesse into keeping Neoptolemus ill-informed of the full picture of Philoctetes, and who Philoctetes is. Philoctetes' contestation of Odysseus' portrayal, and refusal to be instrumentalized by Odysseus' demands, demonstrate a pattern of societal tension that is played out similarly outside the house of

66 Ar. *Poet.* 1450 a1.

67 on character, Sophocles, Aristotle and being "out of character", see essay by Easterling (1977).

68 See Brunschwig (1996), 42.

Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus in *Electra*, on the burial grounds of Ajax in *Ajax*. The sheer multitude of such instances tells us that exclusion and its discourse promise to be a fruitful focus for reading Sophocles, and one that is always and always broadly open to contextualization within instances of exclusionary discourse from our own times.

Many structural threads – of characterization, of dramatization, down to shared imagery in the representation of self and other – link up Sophoclean scenarios and characters in ways that transcend a case-by-case analysis. These shared structural threads or traits offer not so much an image of the tragic protagonist as the excluded individual, as of the community at large and its shortcomings in the firm retention of all who belong to it. For in every case, the exclusion devolves from a state of prior inclusion of the person, in other words, a previously well-situated and socially accepted person is lost to the community out of a variety of circumstantial changes (each case has to be viewed on its own). What is more, Sophoclean drama eludes an analysis of narrative focalization in which the audience's point of view should be identical to those characters in the drama who either antagonize or seek to calm down the tragic protagonist. Thus, Sophocles does not merely set up the protagonist and their tragic fate as material for discussion, but also sets up the surrounding personages, who all together roughly fall into what might be called a community, as an object of contemplation and discussion by the audience. As has been copiously observed by scholars, Sophoclean drama thrives on tragic communication failures; communication failures that the spectator can anticipate given his more omniscient position outside the scene. The community that Sophocles represents certainly and first and foremost offsets itself against the

main protagonist, whom it excludes on various grounds. Secondly, but no less importantly, the fictional community presented by Sophocles acts as a more or less distorting mirror of the real community of Athenian people gathered to witness the tragedy, and invites critique, or auto-critique, upon itself.

Sophoclean drama is first and foremost the presentation of a community and how the community reacts and frames the fall from grace of one individual and how really, the community engineers the individual's exclusion. In so doing, cognitive leaps are needed again and again. A mixture of fictions, myth (not only religious myths; also social mythology) and evidence gets meshed together into narratives of departure from the social or even human norm. This narratives becomes the source of arguments in favour of social exclusion. There is a big disconnect between protagonist and the community. This disconnect is glossed over many times, and manifests itself in (tragic) lags of cognition. Why is this the case? Eventually, this question may abut on to a discussion of responsibility and blame in tragedy. No-one ever wants to take the blame for tragic events, that is almost a universal fact. The contemplation that Sophocles' tragic community disconnects itself from the tragic protagonist, but glosses over the disconnect by issuing oblique statements of pity, consolatory remarks or encouragement to a certain behaviour that the protagonist can not possibly adopt. Through its actions and the cumulative value of its comments and encouragements, the tragic entourage ultimately expresses the truism that the person to whom terrible things have happened “only have themselves to blame”. I argue that Sophocles invites every one to recognize this to be a truism, to be an engineered social mechanism of exclusion, and to evaluate it ethically, and critically.

II. Social exclusion and its discontents

This section begins with Oedipus and his several exits and re-entrances to Thebes, his back and forth journeys from and to exclusion. It is at times counter-intuitive, or perhaps it is just ironic, that the wish to be expelled is not granted to Oedipus when he wants it, and when the audience surely expects it. Instead, it will in *OC* become a matter of bitter remonstrance that Oedipus is kept at Thebes and driven out in old age against his will in the *OC*. It is a dynamic reminiscent of how Philoctetes, who does not want to return to the army because he is much too offended, will come back at last. The dramaturgy with Heracles *ex machina* at the end of *Philoctetes* is mildly counter-intuitive; these "contre-temps" of spectator expectation about exclusion and inclusion surely highlights the very troublesome nature of social exclusion, its processes, and its discontents. Especially, it emerges that it is all but impossible to get someone back once he has been excluded. As we will see, this even applies to dead actors, like Polyneices or Ajax, whose funerals become the matter of heated debate. In those two plays, the sibling's struggles to reinstate the excluded dead is a further facet of the social fissures and discontents of exclusion.

1. Futility of recalling an outcast back to public service

We begin with the end, so to speak: after a lengthy process of exclusion, there are cases where the excluded ends up being needed, and is recalled into the community, for example to perform certain services or contribute with something only that person can give. In Sophocles, these requests are met with wrath, accusations of hypocrisy, flaring tempers and renewed explanations of how and why the exclusion has driven a wedge between group and individual that will remain insurmountable.

Nobody states this in a manner more self-aware than the Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus*, whose apologies betoken the engagement with a complicated legal analysis of Oedipus' wrongs, as well as cognizance and damnation of the social exclusion process that has taken place. In *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus returns in memory to the time at which he committed incest with Jocasta, and evaluates the way in which the society has judged him since. Without mitigating the shame felt for the act of incest itself, he critiques the unkind reactions from the environment, as if to say that to exclude him from the community after all that has already happened to him merely adds insult to injury. Oedipus' core argument is that he was not as much to blame for the incest as really was blamed, because of not being aware of what he did.

ὧν οὕνεκ᾽ ἐκφοβεῖ με: τοῦτ᾽ ἐγὼ καλῶς
ἔξοιδα. καίτοι πῶς ἐγὼ κακὸς φύσιν,
ὅστις παθὼν μὲν ἀντέδρων, ὥστ᾽ εἰ φρονῶν
ἔπρασσον, οὐδ᾽ ἂν ὧδ᾽ ἐγιγνόμην κακός;[69]

The reasons why you fear me, I very well know.
And yet, how am I of a bad nature?
I who suffered, doing the opposite of what, if I had known,
I would have done. Could I possibly have been born so evil?

Oedipus is drawing attention to his perceived distinction between being a bad man by his nature, as his opponents apparently suggest, and his own situation: to have done horrible deeds inadvertently. In this latter case, not knowing what he was doing, and doing things which he would not have done if he had fully understood his own circumstances, is ethically on a different plane. They hypothetical rhetorical question "How am I of a bad nature?" (literally: I was not becoming, i.e. was not being born, raised and living the course of my life as a bad person). Oedipus frames his complaint within notions of *phusis*, surmising that his aristocratic position guarantees him the right to say that his incestuous liaison was a horrible mistake that he would not have made if given full disclosure of the circumstances. In other words, for Oedipus it is completely out of the question that his mistake and his behaviour as a perpetrator of incest was in any way part of his nature. He is shocked at the very suggestion that he might be in any serious way deviant, tainted, or worthy of exclusion by the community.

The idea that Oedipus became guilty of incest without his

69 Soph.OC.269-72 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 368).

intention repeats itself in the play at several places. Herewith, as Guidorizzi has already noted, begins the first of Oedipus' three apologies in this play, all tapping into the same argument: the involuntariness of his wrongs, and mitigation of his guilt.[70] This argument is certainly a new update since the ending of *Oedipus Tyrannus*, in which all guilt and shame was concentrated on Oedipus and no mitigating circumstances were offered. At the end of *Oedipus Tyrannus* is an Oedipus fully conscious of what he has inadvertently done, accepting the blame and shame as if he had committed incest on purpose.

There is more. In fact, in *O.T.* Oedipus reaffirms his identity as a perpetrator of incest and "seals the deal" by repeating the behaviour with full awareness. As horrified onlookers report, Oedipus in seeing Jocasta hanged, and knowing now that she was his mother, he engaged one last time in his incestuous eroticism with his mother in full alertness of what he is doing.

> ἀποσπάσας γὰρ εἱμάτων χρυσηλάτους
> περόνας ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς, αἷσιν ἐξεστέλλετο,
> ἄρας ἔπαισεν ἄρθρα τῶν αὑτοῦ κύκλων,[71]
>
> having torn from her cloak the gilded
> brooch off of her, with which she was adorned,
> he lifted them and smote the joints of his own eyes

The gruesome detail of Oedipus' self-blinding as a self-punishment is blurring out the other, equally heavy fact that is part of this sequence. As he finds Jocasta, hanged, in their bedroom, he

70 Guidorizzi (2008), 245.

71 Soph.OT.1268-70

takes off her dress. This is supposedly motivated by the intention to stab himself in the eye using that very weapon, the brooch which is the only thing holding together Jocasta's clothes. Yet, such a choice of weapon for self-blinding can not merely be a practical one, for Oedipus could doubtlessly, like Ajax, have used one of his own weapons such as swords or daggers, which were readily available to him in his palace. The choice of Oedipus' self-blinding instrument is symbolic: it is directly related to the reason for his self-punishment, i.e. the incest of which he has just become aware that he is guilty, and this final disrobing of Jocasta acts like a consolidation of Oedipus' crime of incest, now for the first and last time done in the full understanding of the nature of the deed.

At this moment, then, one could read Oedipus as taking full responsibility for the crime he is both guilty and accused of. So aghast is he at his own self, that he immediately proceeds to the self-blinding. M. Stella notes that the action of taking the brooch ἀπ᾽ αὐτῆς underscores how much Oedipus is tearing the decorum from Jocasta's own person, rather than merely removing an accessory jewel from her clothes. Jewelled brooches like the dead Jocasta is wearing are both a symbol of Jocasta's social prestige, of her dignity, and as a utilitarian clothing buckle.[72]

By contrast to this final and fully cognizant violation of Jocasta's body in an incestuous (and necrophiliac?) manner, the apologies of Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus* dwell on the overall lack of awareness in which the largest part of his incest with Jocasta had been veiled. Oedipus does not deny the incest, yet he simultaneously accuses the people around him of doing him an injustice in their severe damnation of his actions, for they do not

72 Stella (2010), 290.

take into account his ignorance of circumstances at the time of engaging in those very actions.

> ἀλλ᾽ ἢν γὰρ οὖν ἔξοιδα, σὲ μὲν ἑκόντ᾽ ἐμὲ
> κείνην τε ταῦτα δυσστομεῖν: ἐγὼ δέ νιν
> ἄκων ἔγημα φθέγγομαί τ᾽ ἄκων τάδε.[73]
>
> One thing I know, that you do gladly badmouth me
> and that woman for it, but I married her
> not wanting to do what I did. Reluctantly too do I relate
> it all.

Oedipus not for the first time belabours his point that he committed shameful acts in ignorance, and against his intentions, which he claims could naturally only always be pure. By contrast, Oedipus' critics are giving him a hard time absolutely intentionally, and this is what Oedipus deems as low in character. Oedipus diametrically opposes the badmouthers, who act purposefully (ἑκόντ᾽) and himself, who acted unwillingly (ἄκων). The polarity is supported by the μὲν... δέ sentence structure that sets up a pair of opposites or weight and counter-weight. Yet the argument only slightly falls down, perhaps, in as far as one wonders whether committing incest and killing one's father can really stand next to the act of badmouthing someone as two offences of equal gravity.

Oedipus emits a provocation: although it is Oedipus who has committed the crime, now he is counter-accusing the community of ill-treatment because the reaction is too harsh. Rather than

73 Soph.OC.982-97 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 398).

blame, Oedipus wishes to garner compassion and is set to guide the public perception in this direction. For Guidorizzi, Oedipus translates the heart of the problem on to the community of citizens, in particular upon the row of Oedipus' entourage who acted deliberately hurtfully, and out of unwholesome motives. Oedipus knows they have a personal interest in disgracing him, so that they themselves may perhaps reap some of his power for their own benefit. Oedipus' assessment of Creon especially illustrates his suspicions. All this greatly offends Oedipus, and consequently these men stand accused for the turpitude of their behaviour. For Guidorizzi, they are indeed driven purely by their evil egotism, calculating greed and lust for power, or indeed as the case may be of Laius out of a cowardly fear of his own unborn son.[74]

Guidorizzi has included Oedipus' anger towards Laius, which merits pause. It stems from the knowledge that Laius had had Oedipus' feet cut up, and the baby thrown out. Oedipus' anger against his already dead father not only throws the spotlight on Laius' ill-suitedness for fatherhood. It also helps Oedipus put the blame for his original exclusion from Thebes upon the excluders, Laius and Jocasta, who now look like horrible parents. In turn, Oedipus looks like a victim, and this conceptualization shifts the blame for his exclusion away from Oedipus. We are to imagine that, when Oedipus as an adult is cast out of Thebes for the second time, it is exactly as cruel as it was when he was thrown out at birth—what is more, the reasons have not changed: it is still the same oracular predictions that motivate the desire to exclude him. Furthermore, we are to imagine that Oedipus was used and abused by a demonic power rather than having done any of his reprehensible deeds intentionally. In this model of reading the

74 Guidorizzi (2008), 547.

events, Oedipus would be completely free of any guilt. Both this exposition of Laius' shortfalls, and the protestations against the Colonean villagers who want to deny Oedipus the right to stay, sustain Oedipus' bottom-line thesis that there is an awful lot wrong with everybody else, and only a small fraction of the blame really lies with him.

For comparison, one thinks of how Philoctetes employs an accusatory rhetoric to reject the offer of rehabilitation and return to the army, when the proposal reaches him. Oedipus in the *Oedipus Coloneus* defends himself by bringing into perspective the nature of his own wrongs as set against the wrongs he has suffered at the hands of society. Oedipus' rhetoric of blame makes a case for the collective responsibility, and for the consideration that all his horrific actions happened to him by accident. Oedipus sees his later life in untreated sickness, homelessness and decrepitutde as the result of neglect and abuse by family and community. Even when it comes to the murder of his father Laius as a guilty stain that cannot be absorbed by the community, because parricide always warrants total banishment and exclusion, Oedipus opens the case according to which he should not at all be seen as a father-murderer. The argument is that his deed was manslaughter rather than murder, and most importantly, that he did not know who he was killing.

καὶ γὰρ ἄν, οὓς ἐφόνευσ᾽, ἔμ᾽ ἀπώλεσαν:
νόμῳ δὲ καθαρός, ἄϊδρις εἰς τόδ᾽ ἦλθον.[75]

Truly, those whom I slew, they are killing me.
But I'm pure before the law. Unknowingly, I came to this.

Guidorizzi reads ἄν, οὓς at 271 as ἄνους (witless), which changes the meaning of what is said. The reading "those I slew are killing me" rather than "I slew thoughtlessly and destroyed myself" puts one in mind of a dead man reaching out from his grave, so to speak, to extend his agency through the body of Oedipus, and have his revenge even from beyond the grave. In this case, one may compare an instance of the same theme in *Electra* where the murder of Aegisthus is again and again attributed to Agamemnon, directing his revenge from six feet under through the hand of Orestes and the mind of Electra. Another example of this concept in action is the suicide of Ajax, using the sword of Hector. Even though it is Ajax's own hand that prepares the sword for suicide, Hector is called upon in Ajax's final hour, as if to acknowledge that despite being already dead, Hector is finally killing Ajax. These are all instances of a dead man's agency extending beyond his physical death—at least in the opinion of the dramatis personae in case. Oedipus could be intimating this sort of process taking place in his own case now as well, although Oedipus is not actually being killed by anyone. He is merely cast down from his pedestal of veneration and excluded from society.

75 Soph.OC.547-9.

If we reject this reading altogether, the whole parricide business becomes a case of Oedipus killing "listlessly". In either case, the justification for Laius' revenge on Oedipus is immediately dispellend by Oedipus' next point, which his that he should be legally innocent. To juxtappose notions of poetic justice with prosaic legal lingo is surely provocative. But for Oedipus, it turns out to be a roundabout way to disprove the faith of those who think he should be expelled or not even let in to the community at Colonus.

Jebb pairs up the reference to a law according to which Oedipus should be “pure”, with Plato *Laws* 869c. It posits that killing one's father without the knowledge that the murder victim is the father, makes one guilty of simple murder rather than parricide. The poignancy of Oedipus' situation is that, even if he legally could make his case that he should be considered “just” a murderer rather than a parricide, for the community here depicted by Sophocles, this holds no veracity. Knowledge that he killed his own father regardless of the circumstances remains the chief deed of which Oedipus is guilty. As Berzins-McCoy argues, the pollution of murder and especially parricide counts as a most terrible violation of the moral order. Despite Oedipus' legal argument about not knowing, the chorus and other parts of his surrounding society do not change their standpoint. The fact that Oedipus was able to kill Laius despite all the precautions taken against its prophesied occurrence makes it worse, and not better. In this reckoning, the parricide absolutely does merit expulsion and exclusion.[76]

In *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus stands accused, thought to be the sole cause of many tragic events. But Oedipus' argument posits

76 Berzins McCoy (2013), 43.

that the blame for what happened is actually dispersed across the entire group. In other words, every single citizen is in part personally responsible for the tragic events; Guidorizzi even speaks of collective guilt.[77] Many male Thebans, and not only one individual come under Oedipus' accusatory scrutiny:

τότ᾽ ἐξεώθεις κἀξέβαλλες, οὐδέ σοι
τὸ συγγενὲς τοῦτ᾽ οὐδαμῶς τότ᾽ ἦν φίλον[78]

That time you kicked me out, you weren't interested
Our family bond was no longer dear to you.

It is clear that the rejection of a kinsman (συγγενὲς) is meant to sound shocking, and unforgivable. We may compare with how in *Antigone*, Polyneices' body outside the walls illustrates the exclusion from the *polis* that Antigone finds in her turn shocking. Polyneices' distant location on the spatial coordinates of Thebes already symbolizes the whole situation: Polyneices is out. This is how, too, we may understand the island Lemnos in *Philoctetes:* the geographically peripheral place of the person symbolizes the social situation. In both cases, it is a state of exclusion, and the same is true of Oedipus when he is on his exile journey and arriving at Colonus.

Broadly speaking, two conflicting strings of evaluation of Oedipus' murder of Laios only bring back the critical conflict of view points on the entire Oedipus story. Innocence in the terms of the law, and social stigma of parricide (translated sometimes as

77 Guidorizzi (2008), 302.

78 Soph.OT.770-1

"ritual contamination"[79]) are barely reconcilable. This tension of polarized mindsets is intrinsic to the play. It creates an argumentative vacuum between two separate lines of argument that, like the two sides of an asymptote, never can meet in the middle. Guidorizzi speaks of mutually aporetic value systems. In 5th century Athens, this sort of conundrum also is developed in oratory, in e.g. Antiphon 3.3.6.[80] Oedipus readily blames and shames the community for expelling him and leaving him to suffer on his own. When his son comes at the eleventh hour to fetch him back to Thebes, Oedipus has only disappointment and indignation left for their antics.

> σύ μ᾽ ἐξέωσας, ἐκ σέθεν δ᾽ ἀλώμενος
> ἄλλους ἐπαιτῶ τὸν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν βίον.[81]
>
> You thrust me out. On your account I am a vagrant
> And beg my way from day to day.

Translating ἀλώμενος approximately as "vagrant" captures the sense of unkemptness and haphazard living that Oedipus is exposed to since his extradition. Even in modern times, the narrative of a homeless man whose family suddenly begins to stir and busy themselves trying to rope him back into the family home is a type of plot that we may see in film and television.[82] The plan rarely works: expelled from home, sick and left to survive on his own devices and the kindness of strangers, the person in case is more often than not reluctant to return into the home of their own

79 Guidorizzi (2008), 271.

80 Guidorizzi (2008), 271.

81 Soph.OC.1363-4 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 413).

82 Example: B. Pampaloni's *Roma Termini* (2015)

family, which has so long remained passive and let bad things happen to the person for so long. The alienation grows with time, not only from the side of the community, but also from the viewpoint of the excluded member.

A similar reaction comes from Philoctetes, when Odysseus goes to find him on Lemnos to bring him and his bow back into the army. During his forced retreat on the outer fringes of the inhabited world, which was imposed on him by those very inhabitants, Philoctetes has come to his own realizations about the hypocrisy of society. When Odysseus encourages Philoctetes to come back, make himself useful in the army, and perhaps even gain some military honour, Philoctetes' reaction is a resounding "no".

> οὐδέποτέ γ': οὐδ' ἢν χρῇ με πᾶν παθεῖν κακόν[83]
> Never more! Not even if I had to suffer the entirety of evil.

Like Oedipus, Philoctetes has become tramp-like and unkempt, worn down with pain and disease with advancing years.

That the transformation is theoretically reversible, is the belief shared by various actors in *Philoctetes*. Recovered or not, Odysseus simply needs Philoctetes to come back with him and to shoot his arrow, in order for the Trojan war to conclude favourably for his army. It had been prophesied that only Philoctetes and the arrow from his bow could deliver the final blow to the opponent and settle the victory of Greece over Troy. His success at the pursuits of fine young men had originally seen Philoctetes as firmly within, rather than outside of, the circle of

83 Soph.Phil. 997-999 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 353).

Greek culture's active representatives. Odysseus has in mind to "hunt" Philoctetes, or his bow.

> ἐγὼ δ᾽ ὁρῶ οὕνεκα θήραν
> τήνδ᾽ ἁλίως ἔχομεν τόξων, δίχα τοῦδε πλέοντες. [84]
>
> I see that we have made our hunt
> For these weapons in vain if we sail without him.

For Odysseus, Philoctetes is just a semi-animal. Yet after the crisis of his illness, an understanding spreads amongst the cast of *Philoctetes* that recovery is possible. For a moment, Philoctetes is an honorable man after all, and not the beast that Odysseus had painted to Neoptolemus. The chorus highlight the restorative qualities of sleep (843ff.), supplemented by prognoses on Philoctetes' recovery (they speak of a good night's sleep and its healing powers, 858). The health prognosis is a crucial vector, for implied in it is the idea that Philoctetes can recover from his illness. From a physical recovery could follow his social rehabilitation, and re-integration within his community. Philoctetes could re-emerge, once again a great archer, just like he used to be.

Yet this discourse does not work on Philoctetes. Reversing the disease, returning the man to his community, all rings of false pretences to him. Odysseus had already tried to entice Philoctetes with the prospect of rehabilitation and a return to his dreamed-of life as a war hero, for which he had prepared all his life. But by the time he had lived alone on Lemnos for a whole decade, Philoctetes had experienced a grand disillusionment with the army

84 Soph.Phil.838-39 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 328-9).

and its supposed symbolic capital. A faceless, nameless group of peers dropped his sleeping body on Lemnos when he was sick and needed help, and then crept away. This action was taken out of fear of contagion, though Odysseus tentatively explains that Philoctetes was causing a disturbance to religious worship.[85] The mention of religious motives stems from the need to make an ugly decision sound legitimate. Philoctetes' disease and its symptoms were beyond the pale for this group of sailors and soldiers. The return of two delegates, despite knowing of Philoctetes' long ordeal, underlines the hypocrisy of a society that Philoctetes in his turn finds unacceptable and has no interest in rejoining. In *Philoctetes*, Neoptolemus' cracks up and tells Philoctetes that Odysseus plans to con him. Philoctetes is on the mend at this point, thus he can work up an anger, which will detonate in direct confrontation with Odysseus.

It is imaginable that, had he not committed suicide, Ajax would have had a similar reaction to the embassy of Odysseus and the Atridae in *Ajax*. Teucer lets this on when Odysseus arrives at the site where Ajax lies. A comparable confrontation with Odysseus ensues. Which is much enlightened by setting these two confrontations in parallel. Ajax and Philoctetes both have turned away from their own community, and at a considerable cost. Having had their welfare disregarded and entitlements taken away by others in the group, they reconfirm their separation from the

85 Schein (2013) 118: "Odysseus invokes religious consideration in the effort to justify to Neoptolemus his treatment of Philoctetes, but does not refer to Philoctetes' lameness and foul odor, which Philoctetes later implies were also reasons given for abandoning him.

group by refusing the recall to the group. They exclude themselves, so to speak.

Counter expectation, Philoctetes eventually will come with them on their ship. Persuasion obliges, aided by a Heracles *ex machina*. The counter-intuitiveness of the behaviour only highlights what doubts remain. How can Philoctetes possibly return to his old seat in the group, as if nothing had come in between?

There and then, it seems as if Philoctetes has been provisionally rehabilitated to his former self, in order to pull his weight for the community once again. The assumption is that the departed can be retrieved. At least, the individual's body can be retrieved physically. Naturally, and socio-psychologically, the understanding of the person has changed. Odysseus' own attempt at restoring or rehabilitating Philoctetes turns out to be a failure. Philoctetes is definitely not willing to come back, but then arrives Heracles, who once more brandishes promises of rehabilitation and social re-integration in a way more seductive than Odysseus' perhaps. Heracles succeeds in reversing Philoctetes' decision at the eleventh hour, and manages to annul Philoctetes' previous rejections of Odysseus' proposals. In *Oedipus Coloneus*, the embassy to Oedipus did not succeed to bring the subject back. In *Philoctetes*, the reluctant re-insertion of the damaged and excluded subject comes to pass. Yet it leaves behind an impression of a false ending to the story. Because the outcome weirdly jars with all that came before, some critics consider that *Philoctetes* practically has an extra ending after the ending. For Sewell-Rutter, "the return of events into their proper groove, the groove leading to the fall of Troy, involves a *volte-face* of the logic of the story".[86] At the end of *Philoctetes*, everything is set

86 Sewell-Rutter (2007), 147.

for the return of Philoctetes, wounded and ailing, but still useful and indeed crucially necessary to the military operation. He is anticipated to put his bow to good use at last and to return to his family with the decorations of battle, back into social acceptance, towards a restoration of his lost social ties.

The only chip in the varnish of this pretty picture will be its falseness. As Philoctetes and Neoptolemus both know, the entire rehabilitation action in *Philoctetes* is instigated by Odysseus for utilitarian purposes. The discourse of Philoctetes' potential recovery is tainted by the knowedge that it is only used as a ruse. For ruses are unsavoury, at least in *Philoctetes* the presence of *dolos* is apt to falsify the result of the whole equation. "Dolos in *Philoctetes* is always presented as an ethically disreputable act",[87] writes Finglass who finds this particular structural dynamic is also in *Electra.* Similarly to *Philoctetes* and *OC*, *Electra* opens with two characters entering a foreign scene, planning to fetch something and be gone. Their plan to use trickery and deceit may lead to a short-lived success. But on the long term, even if the society gave a welcome back to Philoctetes, or Oedipus etc., psycho-social changes have happened on both sides which will reveal themselves to be irreversible. For one thing the hero, or hero's relatives, have made discoveries about the hypocrisy of their own society and the falseness of certain promises. Since the past never lets itself be rubbed out (in spite of every effort), restoring harmony in situations as tragic as the ones that tragedy —as the name suggests—deals with is almost completely impossible.

The same problem enters our focus in reading *Ajax.* Once the struggles and turmoil are over and Ajax dead, he is debated about,

87 Finglass (2007), 89.

and will be rehabilitated in leaps and bounds. In the end, Ajax receives belated military honours. Despite their strong differences, Ajax will be re-appropriated by the group. This is particularly easy to do because Ajax is dead and not able to protest. The process certainly seems false, and even abusive, to Teucer. As Ajax's younger brother, Teucer deflects many insulting remarks against Ajax from the camp officials, but a consensus is eventually reached. None the less, Teucer forbids Odysseus from taking part in Ajax's burial because it seems to him that Ajax would have hated that to happen. Teucer's loyalty to his dead sibling is not a million miles away from emotions exhibited by Antigone. Like her, Teucer is determined to fight for the truth. He is not content with a pro-forma goodbye that would fail to address the issues that slumber beneath Ajax's segregation and his suicide. He wants the Atridae to admit they did Ajax wrong. Only in second place is the desire to raise the reputation of Ajax back to the point where it was before he went insane and became a laughing stock to his peers. This also explains why Teucer would rather not let Odysseus have a hand in the burial ceremonies. Having Odysseus perform some of the burial honours would certainly be worth its share in symbolic capital and social prestige. Yet, Teucer is all about truth and reconciliation, and he knows that it is impossible, now, to reconcile Ajax and Odysseus. He therefore asks Odysseus to stay away from the burial ceremonies. For Teucer, truth comes first, formal honours come second.

Next to all these men, we also find Tecmessa to change her view of Ajax gradually. Tecmessa reconsiders her opinion of Ajax long before the conflict between Teucer and the Achaean men. Until Ajax's last moments, Tecmessa shamed and blamed him, actively supporting Ajax's exclusion. Yet after his death, Tecmessa re-

appropriates him as her husband. Even Odysseus calls Ajax ἀρίστος:

> καὶ τὸν θανόντα τόνδε συνθάπτειν θέλω
> καὶ ξυμπονεῖν καὶ μηδὲν ἐλλείπειν ὅσων
> χρὴ τοῖς ἀρίστοις ἀνδράσιν πονεῖν βροτούς.[88]
>
> I want to bury the departed,
> To perform it well and leave nothing out
> everything that great men deserve to get done by other men.

We see how Ajax's image shifts shape throughout the play, every time he is talked about. *Antigone* and *Ajax* both showcase some heated discussions on the subject of a dead person, where speakers debate the deceased's appurtenance to the group or his exclusion. It is fair to say that in these discussions, the group's idea of an individual is much more in focus than the individual per se. Ajax is long dead when his rights and wrongs are being debated and the decision to give him a funeral rather than to dispose of his body like of a traitor's body, comes as a kind of posthumous restoration of his social appreciation. This acceptance Ajax was desolate to have lost, when he was still living. This posthumous rehabilitation hides within it a kind of violation. If we come back to Oedipus and his vociferous rebuttals in *Oedipus Coloneus* we understand the nature of this violation. When Oedipus wanted to leave Thebes, his exile was not granted. When he had become accustomed to his situation at Thebes, he was exiled. Now that he has found a good home as a refugee at

88 Soph.Aj.1378-80 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 55).

Colonus, they are asking him to come back; all in all, Oedipus is loathe to return to his natal Thebes. He is not willing to be re-absorbed into a society that has mistreated and neglected him (cf. *OT*.437ff.). Oedipus' identity will continue to be talked about, and live on beyond Oedipus' physical death, and Oedipus knows this. Therefore, he does not want his person, or even his dead body, to be snatched and put into a Theban funeral home. He is preparing to die in Colonus, and the eventual disappearance of his body into thin air will forever deprive Thebes of the chance to re-appropriate Oedipus.

Our third and final example of this process is from *Electra.* Electra opposes the idea of Clytaemnestra's belated burial rites to Agamemnon. Clytaemnestra herself the murderer, so what is she doing now performing funeral rites? For Electra, this can only spell disaster. In *Electra* and indeed in Ajax, the formal burial is eventually offered by the hostile party (Odysseus; Clytaemnestra) in an attempt to restore what has been upset. That a falseness lurks behind the gesture is immediately visible to Electra, also Teucer in *Ajax* is reluctant to let Odysseus too near the funeral. When Electra hears from Chrysothemis that Clytaemnestra has decided to convey some funerary gifts to Agamemnon's tomb after all, she severely warns her sister against taking part in this action and highlights its impropriety.

> τύμβῳ προσάψῃς μηδέν: οὐ γάρ σοι θέμις
> οὐδ᾽ ὅσιον ἐχθρᾶς ἀπὸ γυναικὸς ἱστάναι
> κτερίσματ᾽ (...). [89]

89 Soph.El.432-4 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 77).

> do not put anything on the tomb; it is not right for you
> and not pious to place there from this hateful wife
> the offerings (...).

In her analyses of the burial conflict in *Antigone*, Honig makes a parallel with the rhetoric of an HIV-activist group in the 1990s, which turns the same burial conflict into a prominent focus. As Honig summarizes, the community of HIV-positive gay men explored and problematized the way in which they have been excluded from many parts of society, often rejected by their own family. Yet, of those who succumbed to AIDS, many were given religious burials which sought to efface the struggles of the gay man, and re-introduced the rejected person in the form of a dead body, by way of covering up all the tension. As Honig writes,

> "the most terrible thing is to be dehumanized in life, cast outside of the social contract's circle of concern only to then be rehumanized in death, returned to full human dignity with a decorous burial. Here, burial, which claims the register of dignity, seems more like use – a cover up of an (ontological) crime".[90]

Honig applies this idea to *Antigone*, where the issue of Polyneices' re-introduction into Thebes and its inner circle is forced by Antigone's rejection of Creon's orders, rather than offered by Creon in a way that may be thought reprehensible because of its falseness in light of the aforegone events. The reasoning also sheds light on the three conflicts of failed rehabilitation or resistance to re-appropriation after a social exclusion that we have just inspected: Clytaemnestra has no business making funeral donations to Agamemnon, at least not in Electra's opinion; Odysseus has no right to conduct Ajax's funeral, at least not in Teucer's opinion; Philoctetes is not happy to come back with the army, even though he will end up doing so anyway; and Oedipus

90 Honig (2013) 64-5.

will not allow his family to bring him back to Thebes, or to fetch his body after his death. The conflicts are perfectly discrete from one another and play out in different circumstances. What shines through them all is the certainty that after what has happened, rehabilitation is futile, and supporters of the excluded person (sometimes that is only the person himself, i.e. Philoctetes or Oediups) are on anyone's case who wants to feign the restoration of harmony with any kind of ulterior motives.

2. Personality clash: Odysseus and Ajax

It is impossible to underestimate the importance of the heroic identity and its discontents, explorations of its backgrounds and other sub-themes from epic traditions, not least the inherent psychological and psycho-social conflicts attached to the heroic lifestyle in Greek poetry. Inklings of these conflicts certainly do surface in *Philoctetes* and *Ajax*, digested and re-presented as tragic themes dramatized for spectator consumption in the 5th-century *polis*. Scattered throughout the tragic texts, one finds variations on the theme of epic heroism such as this one from *Ajax*:

> Ὅτου πατὴρ μὲν τῆσδ᾽ ἀπ᾽Ἰδαίας χθονὸς
> τὰ πρῶτα καλλιστεῖ᾽ ἀριστεύσας στρατοῦ
> πρὸς οἶκον ἦλθε πᾶσαν εὔκλειαν φέρων[91]
>
> My father, of the land of Ida,
> First of all, excelled most decorously at war,
> And returned home, bringing great glory to house and hearth.

The vocabulary of heroic or at least military identity is prominent here;[92] the critique of such an ideology is articulated by the Odysseus of this play, whose moderate and loquacious way of getting things done contrasts with Ajax's hard-lining and uncompromising attitude.[93] So uncompromising is Ajax that his

91 Soph.Aj.434-6 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 19).

92 Whitman (1974); Nagy (1999); Knox (1964).

93 Winnington-Ingram (1980), 62.

character could strike Winnington-Ingram as unrealistic. For Winnington-Ingram, the Ajax-figure contrasts purposefully sharply against the Odysseus figure, which in turn advocates moderation, compromise, all the opposites of Ajax, and a poster child for "realism" in tragedy. Comparison between these two extreme figures allows us to see Ajax as an exponential version of Achillean heroism, "one who carries the implications of the heroic code to the extreme possible point".[94]

To see in Odysseus a realistic portrayal of anyone at all strikes us as preposterous. We already have discussed some of Odysseus' actions in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes.* At this point, we need to understand something about the literary aggregate that hides behind the name “Odysseus”. Indeed this character is most heavily laden with superstructures of meaning from other texts, beginning with *Iliad* and *Odyssey.* Odysseus’s character combines the patriotic nostalgia derived of his Homeric configuration with the ruse-employing *forma mentis* so detested by Achilles in the *Iliad*, by Philoctetes in *Philoctetes*, but admired by the narrator of the *Odyssey*—especially in parts where the narrator is Odysseus himself; here the ruses are retold with pride, and they are not disproved. One wonders if the Odysseus of Sophocles sheds, or retains, any or some attributes of the Homeric Odysseus? It is impossible to determine anything with precision here. To put it bluntly, Odysseus is Odysseus. Of course audiences of the tragedies are meant to understand Odysseus as the same man whose travels are told in the *Odyssey.* He is the identical person who has dealings with Achilles and Thersites, say, in the *Iliad*. The only problem is to determine to what degree Odysseus in tragedy projects upon his adversaries there (Ajax, Philoctetes) the

94 Winnington-Ingram (1980), 19.

attributes of his adversaries in the Odyssey (the man-eating Laestrygonians, witches, skyllae, etc.). In the *Odyssey*, he is a prize specimen of Greek culture, impassively traversing warped mircocosm after warped microcosm. No sooner does a new breed of fantasmagoric characters with bizarre entrapments hop on the scenery, that he has found a way to dodge their bullets. Odysseus' bizarroid opponents are in equal measure fascinating as they are horrific. They are monsters. They threaten to destroy all of human life, and they are depicted in poetry with the purpose to entertain, but with a frisson of the unbelievable and the fantastic.

Should the audience, then, be prepared to see Odysseus' meetings with Ajax and Philoctetes in Sophocles as only two more of the same series? Are Ajax and Philoctetes so far flung out of the net of society that they have acquired monster status, the status of horrific and non-human threats to all of human life? The arguments we have just gathered relating to the self-defense of Ajax, Philoctetes, and other excluded characters in Sophocles suggest otherwise. Firstly, the Sophoclean plays draw finer distinctions, as they do not present fantasmagoric monsters against Odysseus, but just men against men. With Ajax and Philoctetes both times Odysseus encounters a sick man; and a small nucleus persists, of the intimation that perhaps these men are really monsters, that they have somehow transformed. There is the suggestion that Philoctetes has become somewhat strange, a bit bestial, and is just not quite a human any more. This kind of intimation, with which Odysseus opens the approach to Philoctetes, will be dispelled in the course of *Philoctetes*. But to begin with, it exists. Indeed it reverberates throughout both plays, and also extends to Sophocles' other plays. This issue shall come

into closer examination, as it has huge bearings on our understanding of how social exclusion works in Sophocles.

III. De-humanization

In this section we contemplate examples of language used to describe an antagonistic protagonist as animal-like, monster like, or automaton-like: a catalogue of de-humanizations in the language of the speaking characters surrounding the protagonist. The demonic agency with which Ajax seems to have been the hands of an evil spirit, how Ajax imagines that Hector kills him from six feet under, or how the axe that killed Agamemnon seems to have an agency of its own, come into consideration here. The monstrous in the humans whom society excludes, comes out through the way that myths of monsters in epic—and we will concentrate on the example of Polyphemus--inform the extrinsic characterization of the tragic protagonists by the people around them. Heracles, Ajax and Philoctets all share structural parallels with Polyphemus, which we will first describe together, then evaluate; we will also discuss the trope of the wild man who lives in the forest, especially analyzing its use and significance in the Oedipus-dramas, and close with a discussion of how the sense of belonging to Greek culture is stripped away from the protagonist by the people who describes him.

1.1. Monsters (1): A cyclopic Ajax

One Sophoclean protagonist who discovers to his cost that he has done something shameful, and possibly iconic in this regard, is Ajax. He kills and tortures a host of cattle in the middle of the night, in the mistaken belief he is looking at his former companions from the army. The event is described in the play more than once: Athena, Tecmessa, and Ajax himself relate parts of the story, duplicating some of the information in telling ways. Athena is the first to relate the event to Odysseus while Ajax is still absent. She explains how she used her super-human powers in order to bring madness upon Ajax's mind that night, and to confuse his thoughts so much that he, in killing cattle, believed to have been killing men.

> ἔνθ᾽ εἰσπεσὼν ἔκειρε πολύκερων φόνον
> κύκλῳ ῥαχίζων: κἀδόκει μὲν ἔσθ᾽ ὅτε
> δισσοὺς Ἀτρείδας αὐτόχειρ κτείνειν ἔχων,
> ὅτ᾽ ἄλλοτ᾽ ἄλλον ἐμπίτνων στρατηλατῶν.[95]
>
> There, he charged towards them and culled many horns in murder
> all around him, he was cleaving them in half through the spine; and he thought
> it was the two sons of Atreus he was thus slaying by his hand,
> first the one, then the other of the two generals, whom he threw himself upon.

The emphasis on Ajax's killings having been done by hand rather than with the appropriate instruments (a point that is repeated several times, cf. 57, 229, 373) connotes that the sacrifice has been done in an improper way. The gravity of such an occurrence can be appreciated also in *Antigone*, where Tiresias arouses a frightful sense of urgency through the mention of his warped

95 Soph.Aj.55-58 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 5). Compare also ll. 235-44.

sacrifices, as sampled above. This portrayal of a sacrifice improperly done accrues the negativity that witnesses see in Ajax's actions. That Ajax's "sacrifice" has not only been done by bare hands, but also inside the house rather than in the open air is valued equally negatively by Tecmessa. It exudes a very bad sense of hospitality indeed, and aligns itself with the narrative thread that tells of a group of guests taken into the house and killed there. Through this thread, it connects Ajax's character with a selection of unsavoury literary figures tinted with dubious overtones on account of their outmeasured and callous use of violence. Examples are the Odysseus of Odyssey XXIV, ruthless in his callous killing of Penelope's suitors whom he locks into his house and hunts down within the enclosed space at the end of the *Odyssey*,[96] or Clytaemnestra's capture by net, and then murder by axe, of Agamemnon on his return home, or the Cyclopeia, in which Odysseus and his men intrude into Polyphemus' cave, soon to find themselves chained and narrowly escaping consumption by this man-eater. Ajax himself talks about his own actions, during a spoof interview conducted by Athena. "Even Odysseus?", she asks with feigned interest, "Even Odysseus", Ajax answers, "but I don't want him to die just yet" (ll.104-6). This individual touch—leaving Odysseus for the end—does not fail to recall the Polyphemus episode in *Odyssey* 9, where Polyphemus spares Odysseus for last.

96 Bakker (2013), 72-3. I thank Giulia Maria Chesi for bringing this to my attention.

‘Οὖτιν ἐγὼ πύματον ἕδομαι μετὰ οἷς ἑτάροισι,
τοὺς δ᾽ ἄλλους πρόσθεν: τὸ δέ τοι ξεινήιον ἔσται.[97]

Noman will I eat last among the comrades,
and the others first; this shall be your guest-present

Such uncivil and brutal behaviour, it is implied, may be the realm of mythical ogres who live outside the law. For Ajax to be identified with these individuals is all the more disparaging. Yet, not only do reports of the tortures taking place inside of Ajax’s home follow a known pattern of hospitality gone awry or a diffuse sense of unfairly deployed violence. Ajax's extrinsic characterization further accumulates a set of attributes that bring to mind specifically the cave of Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*, where men masqueraded as sheep in order to escape, or the cave of Circe, where men were turned into swine and nearly cooked in a wicked witch’s casserole. The structural resemblance emerges even more clearly when considering that in *Ajax* too, the companions use the bodies of animals, Athena's help, and an elaborate plot involving a false metamorphosis, in order to be saved from Ajax's ire. From this perspective, Ajax gradually takes on the role of one of the *Odyssey*'s many terrible and hostile creatures.

τοὺς δὲ διὰ μελεϊστὶ ταμὼν ὡπλίσσατο δόρπον:
ἤσθιε δ᾽ ὥς τε λέων ὀρεσίτροφος, οὐδ᾽ ἀπέλειπεν,
ἔγκατά τε σάρκας τε καὶ ὀστέα μυελόεντα.[98]

Then he cut them limb from limb and made himself a meal,
swallowed them like a lion raised in the hills, and left nothing
of the entrails, the flesh and even the bone and marrow.

97 Hom.Od.9.369-701 (Stanford 1965: 142).

98 Hom. Od. 9.291-93.

Polyphemus' size is in proportion to humans as humans are to puppy dogs. This allows him to dangle two of them up in the air and smash their heads on the stone so their brains flow out. Later, he eats them. The Cyclops' feasting on the men is presented as leonine, and the lion is ὀρεσίτροφος ("reared in the hills"), establishing Polyphemus as a violent predator. Ajax, for his part, does not eat his victims, but, like Polyphemus, he kills them violently, with bare hands, indoors.

Of course, Ajax only dreams that his victims are Odysseus and his companions. In reality, they are bovines and ovines. However, this does not make things much better, because Ajax's brutal and bare-handed attack on these animals which he has taken captive infringes on the customary way of killing animals too. Ajax infringes on two counts: if he was torturing men in his cabin, like he fancies that he is, Ajax would fall from grace straight away as a barbaric abuser and a Polyphemus-type evil ogre. If his aggression is directed at animals, like it actually is unbeknownst to him, then he is none the less infringing the customs of how to kill animals for various purposes in an acceptable way.

Ajax has treated the herd of cattle horribly; it is only lucky that they were not people, or thus Athena presents it. In *Ajax* there are visual accounts of how Ajax rent asunder the flesh of animals in a particularly horrific way. His halving of bodies is belaboured more than once as an image of special horror. Ajax's action then not at one, but at two steps removed from its appropriate context. Firstly, he intended to have treated human beings thus. Secondly in the case of animals, that behaviour is acceptable only in certain cases: hunting, but not sacrifice. Further cultural significance of this action sequence can be detected in *Bacchae.* A similar action

is framed here as a terrible mangling of the cultural contexts of hunt and sacrifice. The bacchantes hunt down a flock of cows and kill them by their bare hands, much to the reproof of onlookers. The presentation of the ceremony sounds more like the story of a brutal assault:

> εἶδες δ᾽ ἂν ἢ πλεύρ᾽ ἢ δίχηλον ἔμβασιν
> ῥιπτόμεν᾽ ἄνω τε καὶ κάτω: κρεμαστὰ δὲ
> ἔσταζ᾽ ὑπ᾽ ἐλάταις ἀναπεφυρμέν᾽ αἵματι.[99]
>
> You can see maybe a rib, or a hoof of a cloven-footed one,
> thrown around, dangling down
> or stuck in the pines, with jumbled gore

It is not just that the use of one's bare hands in killing animals is considered to belong to the context of forest hunting as opposed to sacrificial killing. The image of this gore thrown about completely senselessly, and the blood-dripping tree, confer a perfectly nightmareish quality to this event. The description more than suggest that rites has been profaned and every order has been upset.

The gore-dripping tree as a trope of nightmares also reappears in Clytaemnestra's dream in *Electra*, where Agamemnon returns from the dead and plants his sceptre by the fireplace. Then, a plant ("limb") starts to grow from from it, soon casting a shadow over all of Thebes (Soph.*El.*419-24). This tree of limbs, that would bleed if it was ever pruned, taps into the literary topos of bleeding trees as ill omens of things to come. Clytaemnestra *definitely* used the wrong instruments in the welcome she gave Agamemnon: she cut his head in half with an axe.

99 Eur.Bacc.738-42 (Diggle 1994 III :322).

πατέρ᾽, ὃν κατὰ μὲν βάρβαρον αἶαν
φοίνιος Ἄρης οὐκ ἐξένισεν,
μήτηρ δ᾽ ἠμὴ χὠ κοινολεχὴς
Αἴγισθος ὅπως δρῦν ὑλοτόμοι
σχίζουσι κάρα φονίῳ πελέκει[100]

my father, whom in the foreign land
a bloody war did not wipe out
my mother and her consort
Aegisthus, like woodcutters cut an oak,
they split his head with a bleeding axe

Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus are assimilated to the war, that could have killed Agamemnon but did not. This new couple is as hateful and as dangerous as war, it is here implied, and the couple shares the same adjective (φοίνιος) with Ares, as they come to fulfil that which even the war-god himself did not allow to happen.

The sight of what has happened indoors to Oedipus causes the chorus of Theban elders a deep shock, so that only madness and demonic possession comes to mind. Just before this, a messenger gives an unflinching description of how Oedipus did blind himself.

φοίνιαι δ᾽ὁμοῦ
γλῆναι γένει᾽ ἔτεγγον, οὐδ᾽ ἀνίεσαν
[φόνου μυδώσας σταγόνας, ἀλλ᾽ ὁμοῦ μέλας
ὄμβρος †χαλάζης αἱμάτος† ἐτέγγετο] [101]

All bloodshot,
the eyeballs become extinct and don't well up
from the attack putrid drops, and black
rain and thunder of bloodstreams drenches the floor.

Oedipus' eyes here are as blood-red as, in *Electra*, the axe of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus when they killed Agamemnon. Here too, the word φοίνιαι is echoed just a moment later in the use of

100 Soph.El.95-99 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 64).

101 Soph.*OT.*1276-79 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson1990: 170).

φόνου to name the crime that Oedipus has done unto his eyes. Surely the word is simply a frequent one, but at the same time, it accrues its own sinister connotations in both contexts by a renewed use, each time, in close proximity of each other.

Ajax's course of action, which Tecmessa sarcastically calls "that man's idea of a sacrificial offering" (κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός, 220), is reprehensible from more than one angle. As Tecmessa describes how he handled the animals, whom he believed to be men, the description does not fall short of horrific scenarios matching—and even superseding—the brutality of Polyphemus. After beating them in the lung, butchering them on the floor inside a dark cabin, clipping their tongues and hanging them up head-down, Tecmessa tells us how Ajax was whipping his victims and hurling abuse at them.

> κακὰ δεννάζων ῥήμαθ᾽, ἃ δαίμων
> κοὐδεὶς ἀνδρῶν ἐδίδαξεν.[102]
>
> Hurling abuse and insults that a demon,
> and no man, taught him.

The thought that Ajax acquired the inspiration for his words through demonic power, lets one suppose that, in Tecmessa's appreciation at least, Ajax has left the normal domain of human life and departed into the uncanny world of demonic possession. For Nooter, Tecmessa detects divine, otherworldly inspiration in Ajax's words, that betray demonic agency through Ajax.[103] This same frisson is felt by the chorus in *Oedipus Tyrannus* as Oedipus emerges from within Jocasta's bedroom, his eyes full of blood and

102 Soph.Aj.243-4 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 12).

103 Nooter (2012), 35-6.

looking grisly. Again, the suspicion of demonic agency appears in close proximity to the concept of madness or *μανία*:

> τίς σ᾽, ὦ τλῆμον,
> προσέβη μανία; τίς ὁ πηδήσας
> μείζονα δαίμων τῶν μακίστων
> πρὸς σῇ δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ;[104]
>
> What, oh you poor man,
> What madness has crept on you, which great daemon
> the mightiest of them all, has bonded you
> to your unlucky fate?

That *μανία* and *δαίμων* are constructed as parallel subjects here shows even more clearly than in our example from *Ajax* the conceptual proximity of madness and demonic possession in a synapse of social discourse. That the "possessor" must be truly evil is apparent in the mention of a δυσδαίμονι μοίρᾳ (a fate of bad demons). Three images of human bodies cleaved in half or torn to shreds, three literary representations of a brutal and profane killing, tie together these three horrible offenders: Ajax, Polyphemus, Clytaemnestra; Oedipus and Clytaemnestra are tied together in their sinister use of weapons against one's own eyes (Oedipus) or one's own husband (Clytaemnestra); and even the bacchantes with their apparently disorganized way of throwing around torn shreds of animals resemble Ajax in his brutal treatment of his captive herd. Ajax and Oedipus are both thought by their observers to be under demonic possession. A web of literary associations lets us see a set of disparate elements that produce horrendous portraiture, and deprecatory characterization aimed at dissociating onself from the person thus possessed.

104 Soph.OT.1299-1302 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 171).

1.2. Monsters (2): Sophoclean man, Polyphemus and Heracles

Themes of madness and its ability to deconstruct or threaten civilization, resonate in the Euripidean depiction of the madness of Heracles, similarly to the portrayals of Ajax. In the Euripidean *Heracles*, images of hunting and the hunted and of brutal violence committed in unethical ways (978), are supplemented with references to monsters like the Gorgon of the night (880). The others in the drama have an impulse to laugh in the face of such a terrific spectacle of irrationality (950). Here, a more medicalized and almost scientifically teratological potrait of this man-turned-beast, who is simultaneously a semi-monstrous demi-god, seeks to show how Heracles transforms into something other than he was.

> ὁ δ᾽ οὐκέθ᾽ αὑτὸς ἦν,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἐν στροφαῖσιν ὀμμάτων ἐφθαρμένος
> ῥίζας τ᾽ ἐν ὄσσοις αἱματῶπας ἐκβαλὼν
> ἀφρὸν κατέσταζ᾽ εὐτρίχος γενειάδος.[105]
>
> He was no longer himself,
> rolling his eyes he was undone,
> and with veins in his bloodshot eyes
> foam was dripping down his bearded cheek.

The summary "he was no longer himself" (οὐκέθ᾽ αὑτὸς ἦν, 931) gives to understand that Heracles is understood to be possessed, perhaps controlled by daemonic agency or mutated into a force of evil. In *Ajax*, a similar mechanism is at work, which gradually estranges individual and community from one another, advancing

105 Eur. Her. 931-4 (Diggle 1981: II.154)

in function of the hero's (perceived) transformation. As has been said here before, though Ajax had previously been a well-respected member of the military aristocracy, this status was undermined and eventually destroyed by his madness, setting him back to being seen as a threatening and uncivil man.

Heracles' case too is tied to the rhetoric of civilization and its antagonists, impersonated by the awful mythic monsters with whom Heracles has to fight in his quest to rid the civilized world of these dangers. Unlike Ajax, Heracles does not belong to a military elite or an aristocracy, or any civic system. Heracles is officially segregated from the social system,[106] but since he uses his superhuman power in the service of humanity, he is appreciated as a philanthropic superman; of course, it will be all the more awful if he should suddenly go insane. Deianeira often speaks of herself as a woman on the brink of disappearance. The advance of age has left her no recognizable function in the house and social network any more. So too is Heracles on the brink of falling over the edge of social acceptance in his turn, because of his hybrid and somewhat inscrutable nature, threatening to veer from the positive appreciation it enjoys at present, into an evaluation that sees Heracles' hybridity as an abomination and a monstrosity. Heracles is always perilously to falling backwards into the monstrous and uncivilized life forms that he is supposed to keep at arm's length from humanity.[107] Several times in *Trachiniae* it is mentioned that Heracles is performing "services", highlighting that his actions must be closely monitored in order not to get out of hand. So weary is Deianeira of explaining where Heracles is, that she simply states "he was doing some services

106 Silk (1985), 7-8.

107 Liapis (2006), 52.

for someone" (λατρεύοντά τῳ, 35). The bondage to Omphale, which Lichas introduces, is elaborated upon twice (252-3, 356-7); Eurytus insults Heracles, calling him a slave (267-8). Both above humanity and below it, as Heracles is conceptualized as someone with superhuman strength, who is bestial all the same.[108] One can not be sure how to measure the gravity of Heracles' difficulties, knowing that his powers are gigantic by comparison with those of humans. Literary traditions produced both a tragic and a comic Heracleis. One is always unsure which potentialities could end up becoming reality, what really is quintessentially Heracles.[109] It all comes out when Heracles begins to suffer and to go mad. On the Euripidean Heracles, Provenza has written that his madness is the dividing line between instances where Heracles' violence is welcomed, and used to fend off monstrous enemies, and times when it is hazardous, a loose cannon.[110] In *Trachiniae*, as Heracles begins to combust from his skin and goes into a rage, the positive appreciation he enjoyed very quickly turns upside down. In *Heracles*, for Provenza, until Heracles was using the superhuman powers in the service of a so-called just violence, he enjoyed a high esteem, but this all changes when the violence is directed against humans. If Heracles' strength is not harnessed, it becomes hateful.[111] A comparable force is at work in *Trachiniae*, not strictly speaking as a result of Heracles' possession by insanity, but as a result of the fury which is itself a by-product of physical pain.

108 Biggs (1966), 228.

109 A second example is *Tereus*. The Aristophanic *Tereus* largely abstracts from the disasters of rape, anthropophagy, and animal transformation, jumping directly to birds seeking to institute a new government.

110 Provenza (2013), 69.

111 Provenza (2013), 84.

Heracles' fury is of a particularly devastating quality, but in the final third of *Trachiniae,* the audience is more than prepared for its coming. When Lichas visits Deianeira at the start of *Trachiniae* to give her some news of Heracles, he talks of an incident when Heracles killed Iphitus:

> τότ᾽ ἄλλοσ᾽ αὐτὸν ὄμμα, θατέρᾳ δὲ νοῦν
> ἔχοντ᾽, ἀπ᾽ ἄκρας ἦκε πυργώδους πλακός[112]
>
> When his eye wandered somewhere else than his mind,
> he took him and hurled him from a towering summit.

The tale of how Heracles killed Iphitus (which turns out to be misleading because it is not the real reason for his absence) is a glowing example of Heracles' ruthless ways with his opponents. Deianeira is all too familiar with this already, since this incident is Deianeira's very *raison d'être* in Trachis. As she explains,

> ἐξ οὗ γὰρ ἔκτα κεῖνος Ἰφίτου βίαν,
> ἡμεῖς μὲν ἐν Τραχῖνι[113]
>
> Since he put out the force of Iphitus,
> we live in Trachis

Once the couple had settled into their home with a *xenos*, Heracles left again to go somewhere, no one knows where.[114] Deianeira's bitterness on her life in exile, at the mercy of foreign hosts, is shared with various other Sophoclean voices: Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus* bemoans this ill treatment at the hand of his family (OC 426-8); in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*, he reminisces about the family he left behind in Corinth (OT 997ff.); Electra laments

112 Soph.*Trach.*272-3

113 Soph.Trach.38-9 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 242).

114 Easterling (1982), 78.

the exile of her brother (El.1136-9). This exordinate violence that Heracles had used toward Iphitus, Lichas now recalls to the attention. Little does Lichas know that he will soon die of a very similar death. Hyllus will come to Deianeira soon after Lichas leaves her, and will tell her how Heracles handled Lichas upon receipt of the anointed shirt. Having gone into excruciating pain, Heracles shouted at Lichas, grabbed him by the ankle, and hurled against a rock.

> μάρψας ποδός νιν, ἄρθρον ᾗ λυγίζεται,
> ῥιπτεῖ πρὸς ἀμφίκλυστον ἐκ πόντου πέτραν:
> κόμης δὲ λευκὸν μυελὸν ἑκραίνει, μέσου [115]
>
> Having grabbed him by the foot, in the joint area,
> he throws him at a rock emerging out of the sea that barks all around.
> White marrow pours out from his hair

There is a striking similarity in this vignette of a brutish Heracles grabbing Lichas by the foot and crashing him against a rock, and the short passage that brings in front of our eyes Polyphemus in his cave as he shatters the brains of Odysseus' fellow travelers. Hurling the men to the ground he makes their brains flow out and wet the earth : δύω μάρψας ὥς τε σκύλακας ποτὶ γαίῃ/ κόπτ᾽: ἐκ δ᾽ ἐγκέφαλος χαμάδις ῥέε, δεῦε δὲ γαῖαν.[116]

Heracles and the conceptualization of who he is was alrady teetering between acceptance as a genteel superman, and an abyss of monstrosity. By the association with Polyphemus, Heracles finally falls outside of the accepted, into the domain of wild creatures that have to be kept away from civilized societies like the monsters he was, until then, keeping at arm's length from

115 Soph. *Trach.* 779-82 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 271-2).

116 Hom.*Od.* 9.289-90 (Stanford 1965:140).

humanity. He finally becomes onf of those creature that also have to be kept at arm's length.

Already Jebb had found close resemblances with a passage in the Euripidean *Cyclops*, presenting another instance of the same vignette.

> (…) ἁρπάσας ἄκρου ποδός,
> παίων πρὸς ὀξὺν στόνυχα πετραίου λίθου
> ἐγκέφαλον ἐξέρρανε[117] (...)
>
> He grabbed him by the top of the foot,
> Crashed him against the sharp edge of a rock
> And made his brain fall out in drops

Lexicographical choices bring these three short vignettes closer to one another. If the Homeric Polyphemus grabbed the men "like puppies", the Euripidean Cyclops and also Sophocles' Heracles grab the other by the ankle. In tragedy, both hurl their victim against a rock, but the Homeric Polyphemus throws the puppies on the floor. In all three cases, brains and marrow flow out from broken skulls, which we must understand as a formulaic, rather than realistic detail. A drunken ogre smashes a man into the earth, so that his brain oozes out. Three times, then, the same motif of a 'drunken ogre'; the motif appears in rich abundance all over folk tales of numerous origins.[118] We are interested in the Sophoclean variant. Here, the motif is enacted by the furious Heracles, aligning this furious Heracles with Polyphemus and the race of monsters at large. No longer 'superman', then. This mutation into a violent brain-scatterer shows a Heracles more akin to the feared Polyphemus than the celebrated saviour of civilization that Heracles always was. In *Trachiniae*, the fury of Heracles impinges

117 Eur. *Cycl.* 400-2 (Diggle 1984: I. 18).

118 Hansen (2002), 291ff.

as an excrescence of his physical pain, which begins to devour the hero, as he begins to combust.[119] Yet, almost eclipsing this rationale, the outburst of rage at the end of *Trachiniae* capitalizes upon, and is informed by, the gory tales that Lichas and Hyllus tell of his cyclopean brutality. Like with Ajax, there is room for doubts as to who exactly is the victim here, even though brutality certainly emanates from Heracles; but the origin of Heracles' mutation into a monster is surely the nefarious love charm sent by Deianeira.

Deianeira's long string of subtle intimations at Heracles' monstrosity, as well as the tradition of Heracles as an ambiguous figure poised just "betwixt and between savagery and civilization",[120] combined with the disastrous result of Heracles' rage, make it difficult to keep this in mind, but it is worth keeping in mind. Reflecting this back to Ajax, his shattering the brains of some animals (in the thought that they were men), the attributes he receives in his portrayals by Athena, Tecmessa etc. come together to make Ajax look like such an ogre, enraged like this Heracles, brutal like Polyphemus, abusive like a foreign tyrant, and aggressive like a savage predator. These many disparaging characteristics are superimposed upon the description of an attack of madness.

119 For a rich discussion on this point see Jouanna (2012), 82ff.

120 Crissy (1997), 53.

2. Automata: demonic agency and the possession of sophoclean man

Like Ajax's sacrifices gone awry and explained by demonic possession-cum-mental-ilnness, Oedipus' deeply counter-cultural and disturbing act of self-mutilation ends up laying bare a malignant disease. For, no sooner has Oedipus incised his face, that the putrefaction of his flesh is visible. Oedipus' eyes and facial texture appear to be already half-decomposed at the time when he stabs himself in the eye; as Stella highlights, the adjective μυδώσας, meaning "putrid", indicates that it is not simply blood, but a mixture of blood and decaying tissue.[121] The intimation is that some unnatural occurrence has modified Oedipus' tissues. This putrefaction inside Oedipus' head, which now becomes exposed, is as much metaphorical as it is literal. The plague at Thebes, that Oedipus was celebrated for having eradicated, but which his incestuous liaison with Jocasta returned upon him on a metaphorical plane, appears now again to have contaminated him in the literal sense. There appears to be an unknown, diseased or possibly infectious element inside of Oedipus' body. Like the contaminated blood of the Lernaian Hydra, which is the chief lethal ingredient in the ointment that Nessus gives Deianeira in *Trachiniae*, Oedipus' blood becomes "black rain" that falls to the floor and irrigates the earth with an ill-auguring fertilizer that could threaten to make the whole town sick again. The convergence of metaphor and literal sense becomes asymptotically narrow.

121 Stella (2010), 291.

Not by chance is Oedipus considered the emblem of ambiguity by many literary critics, beginning from antiquity. For example Chanter writes about him that he is “a condensation of the stranger and the blood-relative, the outsider and the insider, the enemy and the friend, all rolled into one”.[122] The attempt to “unroll” the character and his multiplex, seemingly self-contradictory collection of attributes, will show that the idea of who Oedipus is follows a fast-paced stream of transformations and multiple re-conceptualizations. None says it better than Tiresias. Full of enigma, Tiresias’ portrait of an unknown man (who will turn out to be Oedipus) impersonates the contradictions that inhabit Oedipus' identity.

> ξένος λόγῳ μέτοικος, εἶτα δ᾽ ἐγγενὴς
> φανήσεται Θηβαῖος, οὐδ᾽ ἡσθήσεται
> τῇ ξυμφορᾷ: τυφλὸς γὰρ ἐκ δεδορκότος[123]
>
> a stranger and a foreigner, and yet born here,
> he appears Theban, but cannot feel
> the disaster: sightless though he could see

The adjective ἐγγενὴς marks the stamp of approval for belonging somewhere in many of tragedy's discourses about collective identity and exclusion. Still a foreigner, he will clarify that he is a Theban; for he went from being seeing to being blinded. If we follow the temporal logic, Oedipus was first a foreigner, who was seeing, and will be shown to be a Theban, who is blinded. Blind on two counts: literally rendered sightless by stabbing himself in the eye at the moment he understands where he came from, and figurately blind to what's happening, as he "can not sense the disaster". Oedipus, who had quite successfully solved the riddle

122 Chanter (2011), 8.

123 Soph.OT.449-52 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 138).

posed to him by the Sphinx, can not solve this new riddle, but rather gets angry. Tiresias in this crucial moment channels the Sphinx with this riddling language.[124] For Stella, it is an indication of the imminent danger for city and king that a riddle-posing, enigmatic voice is back on the scene and heightens the sense of alarm. Just as Oedipus ascended to the throne of Thebes upon solving the Sphinx's riddle, he is about to fall from grace spectacularly upon failing to solve this second conundrum. Once he knows the answer, Oedipus will be destroyed. All the while, he does not sense the danger he is in, because he is "hidden from himself" (as McCoy has written).[125] So ambiguous is Oedipus' social make-up and place in the society, that once the catastrophe has unfolded and the truth of his identity is laid open, Oedipus immediately requests to be exiled, and yet, he will not be allowed to leave.

> ἀπάγετ᾽ ἐκτόπιον ὅτι τάχιστά με,
> ἀπάγετ᾽,[126]
>
> take me away from this place,
> at the earliest

This request will not be granted right away. Only after a time—which the *Oedipus Coloneus* will recall and repudiate—will he eventually embark on a post-catastrophic journey in exile.[127] Oedipus' identity is woven from many threads, though only one at a time is highlighted and evaluated by the community. Without taking into account the time-line of what progressively is learned

124 Stella (2010), 223.

125 Mccoy (2013) 56.

126 Soph.*OT*. 1340-41 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 172).

127 See Seidensticker 1972.

about Oedipus, his identity and his past, the frequent transformations in the eye of public opinion can barely come together as a single thread. At the most, they might leave the global impression that Oedipus is everything at once, a perfectly janus-faced emblem of ambiguity.

By contrast, Ajax's public perception goes downhill in a single, unidirectional process. Ajax does not waste time with stabbing himself in the eye. He jumps on his sword, stabbing himself right through the chest and in the heart. More swiftly and without much mitigation, Ajax will die right away at his own hand. Like for Oedipus, the possession by insanity marks the beginning of the end, revealing unexpected and shameful truths about oneself. But the ambiguity that beleaguers Oedipus' identity is absent, as Ajax undergoes a process of estrangement advancing up until his burial. Here, a conflict sparks up on the subject of how Ajax' identity should posthumously be framed. The Achaean warlords want Ajax's body thrown to the beasts like Creon wants Polyneices', but his brother Teucer argues in favour of restoring Ajax his former status.

As Ajax's fictional wife, Tecmessa chronicles an unequivocal transformation she can see in Ajax's behaviour, reflecting how these changes affect her feelings towards him. So changed is he that she feels deserted by him, as if Ajax is no longer there, and she no longer has a husband. The new Ajax does not meet her approval, full of coarse language and unrecognizable mannerisms.

ὦ δυστάλαινα, τοιάδ᾽ ἄνδρα χρήσιμον
φωνεῖν, ἃ πρόσθεν οὗτος οὐκ ἔτλη ποτ᾽ ἄν.[128]

Oh, unlucky me, for an honorable man to say such things
That before this, he would not have suffered gladly at all.

What is more, Tecmessa considers this change to be irreparable: οὐκ ἂν γένοιτ᾽ ἔθ᾽ οὗτος εὐγενὴς ἀνήρ ("this man could never grow into a well-born man").[129] The words γένοιτ᾽and εὐγενὴς foreground genetic ideas and flag up Tecmessa's fundamental belief that Ajax has transformed from the core. At this point in time, "he could never become" aristocratic, even though he was born that way. According to this logic, it is no longer relevant that Ajax's birth, education, and military leadership were of an elite calibre. It now looks as if the real Ajax has done a disappearing act, leaving behind a strange carcass that moves and speaks, but is not Ajax. The highly respectable Ajax that she knew and loved has turned out to be a horrible abomination, as she concludes ἔγνωκα γὰρ δὴ φωτὸς ἠπατημένη ("I realize that I was deceived by the man").[130] Here, like with Polyneices in *Antigone*, a gradual transformation has brought about a full estrangement. From then on, Ajax is to Tecmessa like Polyneices is to Creon, or Orestes to Clytaemnestra: a disowned and disregarded person.

Infection with a disease of putrefaction accompanies the downward spiral of Oedipus' departure from regal respectability into the space of demonic possession, premature physical decomposition, soon to be followed by his request for departure into exile or the wild life of the hills.

128 Soph.Aj.410-11 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 18).

129 Soph.Aj.524 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 22).

130 Soph.Aj.807 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990:33).

ἐμοῦ δὲ μήποτ᾽ ἀξιωθήτω τόδε
πατρῷον ἄστυ ζῶντος οἰκητοῦ τυχεῖν,
ἀλλ᾽ ἔα με ναίειν ὄρεσιν[131]

Let them no longer deem it right that I
should find myself living at home in the city of my forebears,
But let me dwell in the hills

Like the ὀρεσίτροφος ("hill-bred") lion to whom Polyphemus is compared in the moment of his cannibalistic feast, so is Oedipus now himself requesting to become a hillside dweller, as a result of discovering his nature as a perpetrator of incest. Oedipus envisions living a savage life on the hills, on Citheraeon, the only place for him, which his parents had assigned to be his grave. There, he intends to meet his death and fulfil their will.[132]

One may compare this exit with the wild island life of Philoctetes, marooned on Lemnos because of his unyielding putrid wound. For Oedipus, two reasons might determine the request for life in the hills: the segregation from the rest on the basis of contagious illness, and the social and religious shame of knowing himself to be a perpetrator of incest. The physical disease that seems to be gnawing away at Oedipus, as mentioned, is simultaneously metaphorical and real. So too is the cure identical in both cases: incest belongs outside the city, to the wild men who dwell in the hills, so too do the diseased who suffer from plague—as Philoctetes found out to his cost, in *Philoctetes*.

This type of contagious illness characterized by frightening-looking flesh wounds or skin disease that can easily swerve into a metaphorical discourse on the person's moral

131 Soph.OT.1449-51 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 176).

132 Stella (2010), 301.

doomedness, is not how things are framed in *Ajax*, although his mental possession certainly is presented as the gateway to brutish behaviour and subsequently exclusion from the group. In *Ajax*, *φρονεῖν* and *νοσεῖν* appear together as a pair of opposites in rhetorical figures of opposition (e.g. 259-60, 271-3).[133] This opposition is particularly strongly illustrated by the events of *Ajax* and Ajax'ss departure into insanity. The same language of disease is used of vocalizations of unwelcome ideas in other texts as well, and one may even go as far as to say that imputed madness is a relatively frequent trope. One person, or one side of an argument, claims for themselves the privilege rationality or some form of reasonable thinking; the other side's outbursts of emotion or heated speeches of disagreement are, by contrast, presented as unreasonable, irrational, crazy, or as forms of diseased thinking. *Ajax* is particularly rich in examples of this trope for obvious reasons, but the idea reverberates through many texts. For instance Electra, who stands on the edge of insanity through her obsessive grief and self-neglect, often receives the advice to do more φρονεῖν.[134] Chrysothemis for one feels that the entire tragic situation could be resolved with just a little bit of common sense : ἀλλ᾽ ἦν ἄν, εἰ σύ γ᾽ εὖ φρονεῖν ἠπίστασο ("if only you had good sense").[135] That proposition certainly is futile, for the underlying issue is that a point of no return has been reached in the differences of opinion. A mutually satisfactory agreement is impossible. Even over the dead body of Ajax, the Atridae

133 Hershkovitz (1998) 24-26, esp. n.102, for 20th century scholarship on Ajax' madness.

134 Finglass (2007), 208.

135 Soph.El. 394.

admonish Teucer to practise σωφροσύνη,[136] just what Ajax himself was not prepared to do, because their disagreement had reached this point of no return. In *Antigone,* as Creon begins to understand that Antigone and possibly also Ismene are responsible for the attempted burial of Polyneices, he accuses Ismene of having gone insane and of conspiring to overthrow him. He can only retaliate this by disowning her forthwith from his circle, and does so through the familiar trope of forcing a contrast between his own, supposedly reasonable, countenance on the one hand, and on the other hand Ismene's over-emotional, therefore unreasonable, and ultimately toxic form of thought.

> καί νιν καλεῖτ᾽: ἔσω γὰρ εἶδον ἀρτίως
> λυσσῶσαν αὐτὴν οὐδ᾽ ἐπήβολον φρενῶν.
> φιλεῖ δ᾽ ὁ θυμὸς πρόσθεν, ᾗρῆσθαι κλοπεὺς
> τῶν μηδὲν ὀρθῶς ἐν σκότῳ τεχνωμένων:[137]
>
> Call her, for I just saw her indoors,
> in a rave and not mastering her own mind.
> A thieving heart at first does love
> everything that is not right, scheming in the dark

Ismene's participation in the conspiracy against Creon is only imputed. In Creon's description, λυσσῶσαν gives Isemene a profile of intense madness, similarly to how people speak of Ajax in *Ajax*. Not only Ismene, but also Antigone is, in Creon's view, touched by a disease of thinking, as it emerges for instance in his altercation with Haemon.

> Haem. οὐδ᾽ ἂν κελεύσαιμ᾽ εὐσεβεῖν εἰς τοὺς κακούς.
> Cr. οὐχ ἥδε γὰρ τοιᾶδ᾽ ἐπείληπται νόσῳ;[138]
>
> H.: I shan't hurry to honour the wicked.

136 Lawrence (2013), 29.

137 Soph.Ant.491-94 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 203).

138 Soph.Ant.731-2 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 213).

Cr.: Isn’t that woman grasped by just such a disease?

Ajax's mental possession and its display to the public, as it is engineered by Athena, works to create a social cleft between him and the others. It leads to his total unacceptability by the others, just in the same way as does Oedipus’ physical sickness, even though it is of a purely cognitive nature. Tecmessa's statement that Ajax has changed beyond recognition and “can never become a noble man” even though he was born as one, shows not only how Tecmessa feels within herself, but is echoed by other members of the community.

It gives pause to contemplate that Tecmessa is perfectly unaware exactly how Ajax’ mental possession came about. While Tecmessa is able to see that Ajax’s actions betray insanity, she knows nothing of Athena's role in the transformation.[139] Tecmessa explains Ajax's actions by speculating that he must have departed into the space of wilderness, where he has lost all knowledge of how to perform proper sacrificial rites, how to deal with animals and with people. The audience, on the other hand, has been present to witness Athena's intervention. From outside the microcosm where all these events unfold, we can judge both Tecmessa's assessment of the scenario, and the scenario itself. We can see that she is building her explanation from an incomplete jigsaw set. She lacks knowledge of the real causes. Athena appearing on stage may not exactly count as “real cause” either, but it is what we as the audience have seen. Athena dramaturgically achieves quite a fabulous feat: the audience has to question the validity of their own perception. Tecmessa does not know about Athena; but the audience, who notionally knows

139 Scodel (2009), 428.

about Athena, does not understand what Athena is supposed to mean, and is none the wiser. We are left with the thought that the onset of Ajax's insanity had no obvious natural cause. For Tecmessa, Ajax has undergone nothing less than a genetic change by losing his nobility as a result of brutish behaviour and his loss of reality. There is one person who knows more than Tecmessa, and that is Odysseus. Except Odysseus, Tecmessa and other characters ignore what has occurred. They also want to explain and relate what has happened, but they are "ignorant narrators", as Scodel terms them. The audience can not only see Ajax's insanity, but also contemplate how otherse see it, and contemplate the social reaction to these developments. The reaction is disregard and social exclusion. Scodel noted that in comparable examples in epic, such meetings with gods always happen "in a bubble in which no time passes and nothing is visible on the outside".[140] For example when Achilles speaks to Athena in Iliad I there are and can be no witnesses to this extraordinary interaction. It is presented in a discrete moment that Achilles shares with no-one. By contrast, in *Ajax*, Athena shows and tells it to Odysseus.

> ἐγὼ δὲ φοιτῶντ᾽ ἄνδρα μανιάσιν νόσοις
> ὤτρυνον, εἰσέβαλλον εἰς ἔρκη κακά.[141]
>
> What I did with this raging man in the pangs of madness:
> I pushed him on and threw him to a bad space.

The ἔρκη κακά (lit. "bad enclosures") is a metaphorical way of indicating that Ajax has entered another space—of madness, and, by corollary, of exclusion from normal human life. The description of Ajax as a φοιτῶντ᾽ ἄνδρα ("a raging man") puts

140 Scodel (2009), 428.

141 Soph.Aj.59-60 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 5).

him further into the domain of wild and bee-stung animals, as that verb is reminiscent of raging bulls more than enraged men. Moments before Oedipus blinds himself, he rushes into the house in a frenzy, appearing similarly stung by madness and prey to demonic possession.

> λυσσῶντι δ᾽ αὐτῷ δαιμόνων δείκνυσί τις:[142]
> he was frantic, as if directed by a daemon

Not only do se see again here the concept of demonic possession as an explanation for behaviour that cannot be ingested and absorbed in the society and must therefore be repelled and excommunicated. In the moment of striking himself, Oedipus had only just found Jocasta hanged in the bedroom. He decides to disrobe her one last time, removing her brooch pin, with which he will gouge out his own eyes. Introduced as one raring at them with a spear (φοιτᾷ γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἔγχος),[143] imagery in the scene mixes allusion to the animal kingdom (φοιτᾷ, again), to demonic possession, and extreme states of madness. It conveys a terrible mixture of attributes showing just how remote Oedipus is from civil humanity, obliterating the thought of viewing Oedipus like one's own equal, or even just like an ordinary member of the community.

Elements of narrative that precede Oedipus' tragic self-recognition have aggregated as a set of demonic, brutish and inhumane attributes that will now be attached to Oedipus. Long before the identity of Laius' murderer is revealed, the community is on the lookout for this murderer, thinking that he must be

142 Soph.OT.1258 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 169).

143 Soph.OT.1255 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 169).

"foreign thieves" at first, then refining this to the image of an unknown wild man roaming the forests, in need of being hunted down and checked. The depictions of Oedipus, studded with blips of intimations that he is a brute and a vessel directed by demonic energy, will eventually meet half way with the descriptions of Laius' murderer.

> φοιτᾷ γὰρ ὑπ᾽ ἀγρίαν
> ὕλαν ἀνά τ᾽ ἄντρα καὶ
> πετραῖος ὁ ταῦρος[144]
>
> He rages in the wild
> woods and the caves
> the bull of the rocks.

The sylvan setting, and the appeal to track this man down like hunting game gives an inkling of the fear that the Thebans feel for theis unknown man; they already have "de-branded" him of human attributes and are focusing on his wild and dangerous animality, as a way to stifle sympathy for this person. They are only out to kill him, and it is just a matter of time until this diffuse hatred will finally find its object. That object will be Oedipus. They do not see him as an equal to themselves, but as someone similar to an animal. Concurring with Mark Griffith's points on Polyneices' army of Theban men in *Antigone*, Ruth Padel observes on animal imagery more generally that it channels "huge emblems of uncontrolled male aggression, paradigms of frightening violence",[145] especially in the case of large animals like bulls and horses. The identification of a person with such attributes effectively place the person of whom such imagery is

144 Soph.OT.476-78 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 139). Note Storr's reading of 478 is πέτρας ἰσόταυρος.

145 Padel (1992), 142.

used out of the bounds of the community of humans. When finally it becomes known that this searched-for man is Oedipus, the descriptions all fuse into one. Oedipus has little chance of holding on to his social standing at the point, he is identified as the dangerous brute from the outside they are all looking for. Even as king, Oedipus can then appear like a wild man from the mountains, or worse. At this point he is deformed at his feet, blind, demonic, a found-out perpetrator of incest, and full of disease to top it all. Here, the community's sympathy ends, and Oedipus is an aggregate of all these negative characteristics which have gradually revealed themselves,[146] and exlude him beyond repair from the community of citizens. This is the end, then, and Oedipus is finished—or so it seems. His intrinsic ambiguity and polymorphing identity do engender a subsequent set of unrigorous (for want of a better word) outcomes. He embarks on his journey as an exile, that will eventually lead to Oedipus' mysterious disappearance at Colonus.

This effect plays out differently in *Ajax*. The outcome of Ajax' possession by madness is predictable: he will be finished. Already after hearing Tecmessa's first description of how Ajax acted indoors with the cattle, the chorus proclaim that Ajax is finished.

> περίφαντος ἀνὴρ
> θανεῖται, παραπλήκτῳ χερὶ συγκατακτὰς
> κελαινοῖς ξίφεσιν βοτὰ καὶ
> βοτῆρας ἱππονώμας.[147]
>
> As we all can see here, the man
> will die, having slain together, with a hand that's been led astray

146 See also Thumiger (2006), 194ff. with citations of Segal (1997), q.v.

147 Soph.Aj. 229-32 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 11-12).

and with dark weapons,
the oxen and their oxherds

The image of a "hand wandering astray" (παραπλάκτῳ χερὶ) that slaughters in darkness puts one in mind of the disembodied "hand with knife" trope in many horror films, or in *Oedipus Coloneus* where the trope is explored in an oblique way: ἔπαισε δ᾽ αὐτόχειρ νιν οὔτις, ἀλλ᾽ ἐγὼ τλάμων ("no-one used his own hand here. None the less, I suffered").[148] In *Ajax*, this mysteriously inspired hand is seen carrying out evil actions using Ajax' body as its medium, while Ajax notices nothing. Caught in a dream that falsifies his experience, Ajax thus becomes reduced to an evil automaton.

When Odysseus first hears about it, he is soon struck by the emotional impact that this must have on Ajax. Despite being offended and feeling threatened by the report of Ajax's actions against the cattle that were actually directed at him and the Atridae, he identifies with Ajax as someone who is in many ways his peer. This prefigures the conclusion, which Tecmessa will later draw, that Ajax is no longer Ajax.

ἐποικτίρω δέ νιν
δύστηνον ἔμπας, καίπερ ὄντα δυσμενῆ,
ὀθούνεκ᾽ ἄτῃ συγκατέζευκται κακῇ,
οὐδὲν τὸ τούτου μᾶλλον ἢ τοὐμὸν σκοπῶν:
ὁρῶ γὰρ ἡμᾶς οὐδὲν ὄντας ἄλλο πλὴν
εἴδωλ᾽ ὅσοιπερ ζῶμεν ἢ κούφην σκιάν.[149]

I pity him,
the wretched fallen, even though he is hostile to me,
because an evil blindness is dragging him along,
not looking whether he or I are the better man;
I see that we are nothing, if not

148 Soph.OC. 1331 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 412).

149 Soph.Aj. 121-26 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 7).

> phantoms, all of us us who are alive, just like a flighty shadow.

At the outset, Odysseus identified himself as someone quite similar to Ajax. His words here highlight Ajax's passivity in the events that ensued. Not only did Odysseus witness the agency of Athena in the whole event of his madness. He now also speaks not of Ajax, but of ἄτη (a "moral blindness") personified, as the agent of Ajax's passive experience of his own destruction. Odysseus speaks of Ajax's "being yoked" to work under its external direction. In a first instance, this can sound like wise resignation to the futility of all human endeavour and the impossibility of permanently possessing an identity. We understand that Ajax's identity has left him, or that he has lost it, or that it was taken away from him. We understand what we in large part already knew, that identity is an acquired good which needs to be maintained, or it can go amiss. Loss of identity can throw the person into a social vacuum and state of exclusion. In Odysseus' pity resonates the idea that "this could have happened to me too" or a version of "it can happen to anyone" and so, a real empathy. Yet also contained in this assertion is the knowledge that, for whatever reason, it can happen to anyone, but it did not happen to Odysseus. Immediately one begins to ask if Ajax was more likely than Odysseus to end up that way. With Odysseus' pity, then, no real advancement is reahed in terms of allowing Ajax to keep an honorable place in the society. He is no more, and he is out.

The gulf of distance to Ajax then expanded more and more through propositions such as the idea that he is already as good as gone, having removed himself from society of his own accord. In

the Eurysaces scene, (570ff., 610-15), it sounds as if Ajax is making his will, in preparation for his imminent exit. That he would be better off dead, tactless as this may sound, seems to be the gist of the choral utterances, κρείσσων παρ᾽ Ἅιδᾳ κεύθων ὁ νοσῶν μάταν ("He should go hide in Hades", 635). Ajax is one of several rejected characters whose characterization becomes impregnated with attributes derived from the Homeric Polyphemus. Odysseus insists that Ajax' destiny would not discriminate between the two of them. For Odysseus in this moment, he and Ajax are entirely substitutable one for the other, and are of equal worth. Honig has pointed out with respect to Creon in *Antigone* and the idea that the classic *polis* would treat every soldier as an "unknown soldier", soldiers at Troy like even Ajax and Odysseus should be appreciated equally, and understood to be interchangeable. This idea certainly reverberates in Odysseus' comment here, supplemented by the trope of men being just "shadows", a statement that could as well belong in Pindaric lyric as Plato's cave.[150]

Odysseus and Ajax did once both enjoy an aristocratic male identity founded in their role as heads of their home cities, as military generals, as heroic warriors in the Trojan war. By virtue of these communalities, Odysseus' self-identification with Ajax is is greater than Tecmessa's, even though it ultimately does nothing to salvage Ajax's situation. It is all the more pertinent to see Ajax himself embracing the same ideology of an identity lost and a life wasted. Ajax will react with the same tone of lament, when he understands the gravity of his situation. As he wakes from his mares, recognizing in shame and terror the actions he has inadvertently done:

150 cf. Silk (2001), 26ff.

ὦ δύσμορος, ὃς χεροῖν
μεθῆκα τοὺς ἀλάστορας,
ἐν δ᾽ ἐλίκεσσι βουσὶ καὶ
κλυτοῖς πεσὼν αἰπολίοις
ἐρεμνὸν αἷμ᾽ ἔδευσα.[151]

I am doomed! From both my hands
I let slip the perpetrators, and attacked the spiral-horned
oxen and the noisy goatherds,
I shed their murky blood.

Formulaic adjectives here describing the animals here a Homeric ring (like ἐλίκεσσι βουσὶ). The idyllic image flickers before the audience, of how orderly the animal life had been before Ajax came in to disturb and kill it all. Ajax actualizes an understanding of himself as a cosmic disturbance, who brings total chaos. This impression is corroborated by other onlookers in his entourage. Yet, there still seems to be method in his madness.

His first potrtrayal, by Athena, brings up the image of a captive herd shackled together and ushered around in chains (62-3; 296-7); this course of action recalls similar literary contexts describing the capture and captivity of vanquished peoples. The fear of ill treatment in captivity at the hands of foreign opponents is a popular trope in Athenian rhetoric and tragedy, giving occasion to vivid portrayals of foreign men who treat their prisoners in a brutal and barbaric fashion. These portrayals may be more politically charged than they are realistic, as they are designed to map out cultural polarities between self and other, good and evil, autochthonous and foreign.[152] Ajax' handling of the

151 Soph.Aj.372-76 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 17)

152 Hall (1989), 6-7, and 160ff.

animals looks like a handling of captive people; but not in genteel manner.

> τοὺς ζῶντας αὖ δεσμοῖσι συνδήσας βοῶν
> ποίμνας τε πάσας εἰς δόμους κομίζεται,
> ὡς ἄνδρας, οὐχ ὡς εὔκερων ἄγραν ἔχων,
> καὶ νῦν κατ᾽ οἴκους συνδέτους αἰκίζεται.[153]
>
> those of the oxen that were still living after he had tied them up with chains
> he ushered into the house, the entire herd,
> as if they were people and not in the manner of handling a well-horned flock,
> And now he is torturing them inside the house, in chains.

If Ajax ushered in the animals thinking they were captive men, following that logic his next step unmasks Ajax as a brutal and sadistic overlord of prisoners. This behaviour is one that the ideal citizen of Athenian oratory would recognize as profoundly different and foreign to oneself. Tecmessa, herself a captive of Ajax, retells what was happening in the house after the animals were herded in.

> ἔσω δ᾽ ἐσῆλθε συνδέτους ἄγων ὁμοῦ
> ταύρους, κύνας βοτῆρας, εὔερόν τ᾽ ἄγραν.
> καὶ τοὺς μὲν ηὐχένιζε, τοὺς δ᾽ ἄνω τρέπων
> ἔσφαζε κἀρράχιζε, τοὺς δὲ δεσμίους
> ἠκίζεθ᾽ ὥστε φῶτας ἐν ποίμναις πίτνων.
> τέλος δ᾽ ὑπάξας διὰ θυρῶν σκιᾷ τινι[154]
>
> He came indoors, leading some shackled
> bulls, shepherd-dogs, a well-fleeced hunting.
> Some, he broke their neck, others, he twisted them upward,
> killed and broke them into bits, and some that were in chains
> he tortured as if they were men, as he threw himself on the cattle.

153 Soph.Aj. 62-65 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 5).

154 Soph.Aj.296-301 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 14).

> Lastly, he screamed through the doors at some shadow, ...

Ajax's act of hanging victims by the feet (repeated from its first mention at 239-40 and here at 298) takes on a horrific dimension, being performed by an infuriated madman, and features of the abusive foreign overlord, reminiscent of atrocities that Herodotus describes, into the descriptions of this maddened Ajax and turn him into an awful stranger. Other common practices are also present in distorted form, exalted to a destructive dimension. For example, the precise cleaving of dead bodies into two parts, divided at the spine (56, 236) may recall the usual practice of successful hunters carrying out the task of the butcher. It also puts Ajax on a par, not least, with the dreaded Clytaemnestra of *Electra*, who cleaves Agamemnon's head in two, with an axe. Such actions performed on a human body, as we can understand across both *Ajax* and *Electra*, are deemed savage and unacceptable. A few familiar patterns are discernible despite their mutated or mutilated form, but everything is warped, inverted or otherwise culturally obliterated by the incongruous manner in which Ajax does it. Burkert has written that ritual is an action divorced from its primary practical context, breaing a semiotic character above and beyond the violence that meets the eye.[155] The semantic diversion stemming from Ajax's false perception has led to a horrible failure of a sacrifice. It is odd, to say the least, how onlookers of Ajax's misdeeds swerve from contextualizing his capture of the animals as a capture of enslaved people, to the context of sacrificial killing of animals. When Tecmessa concludes her description, she says "can you imagine? This is his idea of a good sacrifice!".

155 Burkert (1985), 54.

τοιαῦτ᾽ ἂν ἴδοις σκηνῆς ἔνδον
χειροδάϊκτα σφάγι᾽ αἱμοβαφῆ,
κείνου χρηστήρια τἀνδρός.[156]

Such are the sights you might see inside the tent,
blood-dyed victims, killed by hand,
the sacrificial offerings of that man.

We understand the community is grappling with the meaning of Ajax's actions. The onlookers are caught in a semiotic maze. For, on the one hand, we know that Ajax did not intend his actions for a herd of animals, since in his perception they were humans. But onlookers only saw what really happened, I. e. that Ajax was hacking into a herd. Finglass has charted the ritual terminology, that invites comparison with a *sparagmos* ritual, but one that has gone horribly wrong. For Finglass, "the ordered killing of sacrifice is a world away from Ajax's savage frenzy", and: "ritual terminology emphasizes the horror".[157] Disorderly as it is, Ajax's way of killing animals is none the less invested with warped cultural references, and in the nocturnal cabin, they are tinted in an even more gruesome hue. One is pressed to compare this with a scene in *Bacchae*, where Agave experiences the reverse. She kills something in the thought that it is a wild lion, but in reality it is her son. Her trophy—the head of her own son—turns out to be the saddest trophy in the world (δάκρυα νικηφορεῖ,1147). Ajax is overcome with shame and horror when it dawns on him whom he has killed. The unwanted result is at least as disturbing as the realization that one has been possessed by a delusion of the senses, and that one's body has carried out actions that were not

156 Soph.Aj.118-220 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 11).

157 Finglass (2011), 207.

intended, without noticing it. The human being under the spell of delusions is at least as much a victim, then, as the victims they involuntarily kill. The agents of such completely misplaced killings end up being drawn into a victim-role themselves, and are victimized by their own horrifying possession.[158] Ajax emerges as the victim of a possession, just as much a victim as the animals are victims of his misplaced actions. Not only is Ajax's sacrifial attempt riddled with excessive behaviour and madness. It also bites its own back and ends up victimizing Ajax. We know, then, that both the semiotic contextualization as a sacrifice, and as an enslavement and abduction to captivity, do not entirely cover the community's need for assimilation into a known pattern or understandable context. A third time of cultural contextualization makes itself known, this time not borrowed from real life cultural practices, but from fiction. Literary elements in the description here and there point to a semiotic categorization that wants to see in Ajax particles of an identity reserved for monsters and ogres of fiction, first and foremost Polyphemus. Presentations of Ajax's insane rage, bring to mind the Homeric Polyphemus at the moment of smashing the heads of men “like puppies”: at this moment in fact Polyphemus is inebriated, full of Dutch courage, similar to how Ajax is portrayed as out of his wits.

Although, in *Ajax*, a mental illness deliberately put into him by Athena lies at the root of this edifice of rude characterizations, madness as a disease is not the official reason why Ajax will be excluded from the community. It is this iconoclasm of cultural practices and norms that unites the various characters around Ajax in a sense of horrified estrangement from him, and becomes the reason why Ajax gradually falls out of grace with his own culture.

158 Henry (1992), 155. I thank Eszter Galfalvi for conversation.

In other words, Ajax's insanity is invested with references to the loss of culture, and this latter becomes the primary argument for rejecting Ajax. A rhetoric of moral blame accompanies this that is almost equipped to eclipse the notion of illness that was there in the beginning.

As a preparatory measure, the imagery and narrative contained within the description of Ajax's left-handed nocturnal exploits mark him out as having departed from the mainstay of Greek culture, and more particularly from the values of his own community. Members of the community can level against Ajax that he is acting furiously, like an ogre, violating cultural norms, behaving like an abusive overlord over prisoners.

IV. Limits of inclusion

In this section we have already understood something about the mechanisms of de-humanization of the protagonist. We now go back upon how the outcast him or herself contests and contends against their own re-categorization as something that they do not agree to be. We will contemplate both Philoctetes' eloquent exposition of how he has reformulated nobility for himself in his new and difficult situation, and how scenarios of disease in Sophocles again and again leads into re-negotiations of identity within spaces of re-conceptualization that never sit easily with any one of the characters. The chapter focuses especially on the role of aristocratic origins, ideas of nobility, and how the onset of disease is apt to destroy and remove nobility from individuals in various guises in *Antigone*, the Oedipus-dramas, *Electra*, *Philoctetes*, *Ajax*. The exchange of one's nobility against the role of a conceptual “wild man” comes under special scrutiny here and finally we will highlight the changes in social power-play dynamics this drift entails.

1. Responses to exclusion. Protest of the outcast

Mythological monsters come in to the portrayal of Sophoclean man. This sits uncomfortably perhaps with the speakers who emit such parallels and yet will themselves to be rational and democratic men. The tragic protagonist who becomes the subject of this monstrous profiling has not seldom suffered an illness with little chance of fending it off, but finds himself accused of causing a disturbance because of this illness. Summarily, the destiny of these individuals is significantly shaped by pain, madness or illness entering into their lives. These diseases end up deciding their social fate as well. They all become rejects or outcasts and are profiled as evil, monstrous and possessed. They are excluded on every level.

However, if we interrogate the community, social exclusion is almost never pronounced as a direct consequence of someone becoming ill. It is painstakingly pointed out that the exclusion is caused by the person's deviant behaviour. Exclusion, then, stems from the group's recognition that someone is behaving against the rules. Of course a much greater decorum adheres to those casting out a person because they are going against rules, or cultural norm. By contrast it is definitely rather shabby to cast someone out purely because they have fallen ill.

But where are we? Neither Lemnos, nor the tents and campments at Troy, nor Thebes, exactly provide a direct inroad into tragedy's social image of Athens itself. Parallels between Sophocles' Athens and the Thebes of his tragedies can by definition only be

imperfect and translational. Add to that that Sophocles wrote a very large volume of plays set in the Trojan war, its antecedents or aftermath (47%, according to Sommerstein's investigation).[159] Many are in fragments, but what is certain is that Sophocles extremely often manipulated narrative material from the Trojan saga for the purpose of plays to be shown an Athenian audience.[160] What does this tell us? That we must try to understand how stories lifted from the Trojan war saga relate to Sophocles' Athens, much in the same way that we must try to understand how Odysseus is and is not the same Odysseus? Not only would we run into major tedium if we attempted this, we also would lose sight of the issues themselves. The plays spoke to their audiences, regardless of where they were fictionally set. Figures such as Oedipus and Polyneices hold, within their personalities and their life stories, conflicts of interests and ambivalences toward their fictional city's civic values. Their community then finds itself ill-equipped to absorb these conflict-ridden personalities within its own fabric of a collective identity. As Simon Goldhill has written,

> "tragedy again and again focuses on young men whose behaviour in society puts society at risk. Tragedy again and again takes key terms of normative and evaluative vocabulary of the civic discourse, and depicts conflicts and ambiguities in their meanings and use".[161]

To capitalize on this insight and further refine the point, we may shift attention away from tragedy's protagonists, and on to Sophocles' presentations of fictional communities. As a system, or

159 Sommerstein (2012), 195.

160 A list of the fragmentary plays classed as "Troica", based on the evidence of Proclus is in Pearson (1963), xxxi.

161 Goldhill (1987), 75.

as a whole, the fictional community comes out like a collective antagonist to the tragic protagonist at the centre. Sophocles' presentation of a fictionalized community or society is itself worthy of observation and criticism.

We will now compare and contrast a handful of examples of this process. An individual is excluded from society ostensibly because they are upsetting one or more cultural norms, especially norms of religious worship. Their quarrel with the group, or their disease, or any other reason why this person might not be comfortably included in the group suddenly vanishes in the face of this argument. Surely one might see this and conclude from it that the respect of cultural norms is so all-important, it pus every other issue in second and third place, and that this is the whole point Sophocles is making. Yet, there is more to it than meets the eye. Sophocles does not only show us a community that wants to silence and exclude one of its former members who has fallen short of the community's high standards and rapidly become a disturbance that needs to be eliminated. Sophocles also shows us the protagonist calling into question the integrity of this process, highlighting the hypocrisy of the society, and telling us that social exclusion is more ruse than natural consequence.

2. Philoctetes and the end of sympathy

Philoctetes experiences exclusion, through a prism of gradual estrangement, even though he presents himself as one fully in touch with cultural practice and values. However, the adherence to cultural standards he has grown up practising reveals itself to be of little use and even incongruous, in his new situation of life on a desert island. As he has no company to share his values and cultural finesse with, he lives unhappily alone on Lemnos, fighting the elements anew each day.

> πρὸς δὲ τοῦθ', ὅ μοι βάλοι
> νευροσπαδὴς ἄτρακτος, αὐτὸς ἂν τάλας
> εἰλυόμην, δύστηνον ἐξέλκων πόδα,[162]
>
> "toward this thing, whatever my arrow drawn back with the bowstring might strike, I, poor wretch, would crawl, dragging my miserable foot towards this (thing)" (transl. Schein)[163]

This new found utilitarianism in Philoctetes' disenchanted life has revolutionised his use of Heracles' bow, now a hunting instrument rather than a piece of equipment for the art of war. He has a healthy survival instinct, that lets him lose the scruples to use his special weapon, that was intended for war, as a way to get himself a picknick (to survive). For Biggs, this represents a triumph over his pain.[164] In fact, Philoctetes inadvertently subverts the very reason why he was left there. Officially, he was left there to conserve himself and his bow, as both would be needed at the

162 Soph.*Phil.* 289-92 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 306-7).

163 Schein (2013), 174.

164 Biggs (1966), 232.

close of the war. Yet Philoctetes is not conserving anything, and is using his bow daily. *Philoctetes* foregrounds the ethical chaos created by life in isolation, and more specifically that of a once very important person. Tinted with numerous references to epic heroism, *Philoctetes* polarizes two concepts of human life: the successful and socially thriving, versus the diseased and lonesome. The location of the latter could not be more symbolic. Lemnos, in Greek local legend, symbolizes the antipode of civilization. Mythologies of gruesome murder and carnage are associated with the place. One story tells of how the Lemnian women killed all the island's men, turning it into a desert. When *Philoctetes* was presented at the city Dionysia in 409, Lemnos was not at all derelict. Older legends associated with the place gave Lemnos a barbaric profile.[165] Sophocles used this literary tradition to dip the action of his play in a murky light of horror and gloom.[166] Odysseus landing on Lemnos with Neoptolemus will find offence with Philoctetes' simplistic dwelling in a tunnel-cave, and use many descriptive elements to put one in mind of a wild animal rather than a human being living there.[167] Itis the place where Odysseus and the others, ten years prior, had chosen to leave Philoctetes behind. Odysseus doubts there is even drinking water left on the island (Soph.Phil.20-21). The unsanitary conditions are just the tip of the iceberg, for Odysseus thinks that Philoctetes has gradually become more and more dishevelled and unsightly. Odysseus has Neoptolemus terrified by the thought of the cave's grisly inhabitant with his crippling foot infection.

165 Aesch.*Ch.*631-4; Apollod. 1.9.16; Hdt. 6.138.1-4

166 Segal (1981), 307.

167 Schein (2003), 163.

ὁπόταν δὲ μόλῃ
δεινὸς ὁδίτης, τῶνδ᾽ οὐκ μελάθρων[168]

And when he will come,
the dreadful tramp from out the cave

Odysseus is convinced that Philoctetes must have undergone dramatic changes of character beyond all recognition, as a result of his placement on Lemnos. As we learn from Odysseus at the start of the play, Philoctetes was wounded at his foot whilst en route to Troy ten years earlier. The wound never healed, and as a result, he was dumped on Lemnos where he has been not only cut off from everybody that he used to know, but also perpetually in pain for the last ten years. Odysseus explains it for Neoptolemus,

νόσῳ καταστάζοντα διαβόρῳ πόδα:
ὅτ᾽ οὔτε λοιβῆς ἡμὶν οὔτε θυμάτων
παρῆν ἐκήλοις προσθιγεῖν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀγρίαις
κατεῖχ᾽ ἀεὶ πᾶν στρατόπεδον δυσφημίαις,
βοῶν, ἰύζων.[169]

He was laid low by a disease devouring his foot,[170]
So that neither our libations nor our sacrificial rites
Were possible any more, and instead these wild
Cries that he uttered were filling the camp with ill clamour
Of wailing and of moans

Not without resemblance to the infection emanating from Polyneices' body outside Thebes disturbing Teiresias' religious practices in *Antigone*, Philoctetes' presence, his wound and the noise of his moans, become the cause wherefore sacrificial

168 Soph.Phil.145-6 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 301).

169 Soph.Phil. 7-11 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 295).

170 Schein (2013) trans. “dripping in respect to his foot with the disease that was eating through it”.

offerings can not be done in the right way by the Achaeans, prompting the decision to maroon him on Lemnos. But here as there, the disturbance to worship practices comes as an afterthought more than an original cause. Placing Philoctetes outside, where he becomes invisible, is necessary. But the true cause for this necessity may be more complex than the disturbance to worship. It could be the fear of contagion, like in *Antigone.* It could be the knowledge that medical salves have failed to work on Philoctetes and he is now in the possession of a disease greater than human ingenuity. Much like Ajax's madness eludes the grip of onlookers, Philoctetes' condition was a visualization of how finite the human knowledge really is, how futile and finite the efforts of medical men. These uncomfortable truths emanate from the individual who is the victim of incurable disease, and make Philoctetes uncanny to everybody. It seems as if Philoctetes somehow willed himself not to be cured, as if he somehow "was" the disease. His cries can not be stopped and may continue, but they will no longer be heard by the community. This course of action is also favoured by Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus in *Electra.* Tired of hearing Electra's lamentations, they threaten to lock her away into a dark room somewhere on the outskirts of their property. Electra practically personifies the royal couple's guilty conscience. Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus wish to repress the murder and death of Agamemnon, to lock it out of the gates of perception, sight and hearing. The execution of this wish is not half as elegant. We overhear Clytaemnestra saying:

> ἀλλ᾽ εἴσιθ᾽ εἴσω: τήνδε δ᾽ ἔκτοθεν βοᾶν
> ἔα τά θ᾽ αὑτῆς καὶ τὰ τῶν φίλων κακά.[171]

171 Soph.*El*.802-3 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 91).

> But do come in. This one, we can leave to cry outside over her own ills and those of her loved ones.

When the messenger reaches Clytaemnestra with the news that Orestes has passed away, Electra is taken by an assault of loud wailing. The messenger worries for her emotional well-being, but Clytaemnestra is assured that she should stay outdoors on her own while she will welcome the messenger in her home. This heavy-handed, unmasked exclusion of one person's viewpoint, rings of despotic house rules. Of course the new royal couple have taken justice in their own hand, murdered Agamemnon and banished Orestes, what is to stop them from humiliating Electra and denying her the right to be a part of the family? No secret is made of the reasoning behind the royal couple's attempts to exclude Electra as much as possible from the family, and no secret is made either of their readiness to use brute force if needed. They themselves consider their killing of Agamemnon to be justified, and have driven Orestes out of the city and disowned him. Electra's permanent reminiscence and lamentation of these circumstances is not welcome in their house. The loud moaning of Philoctetes, by contrast, is rooted in physical pain and the putrefaction eating away his foot. A moral reasoning like that of Clytaemnestra towards Electra has no place here. However, a moral reason is none the less adduced, indeed the point that the noise that Philoctetes made when emitting cries of pain became a disturbance to the all-important sacrificial rituals.

The failure of sacrificial rites is a clear sign that some awful calamity is brewing undiscovered. As Tiresias thinks in *Antigone*, his sacrifices refuse to burn properly because of unfavourable airborne elements and the malediction of Polyneices' corpse

remaining unburied. The presence of this corpse, as it will emerge, is the cause of these sacrificial failures.

> μυδῶσα κηκὶς μηρίων ἐτήκετο
> κἄτυφε κἀνέπτυε...[172]
>
> the sweaty juice of limbs trickled,
> fumed and spluttered...

The image of these events in *Antigone*, for Susannetti, brings to mind the Achaean battle field of Homer's *Iliad*, and also foreshadows the lethal contagion of *Oedipus Tyrannus*.[173] Odysseus' horror of the diseased Philoctetes could make more sense within the context of the Iliadic plague, which has its place in the background of *Philoctetes*' literary precedents. More specifically, and through the parallel inspection with the failed sacrifice descriptions of *Antigone*, it appears as if the argument for removing Philoctetes from the social group is based on an alleged dichotomy and mutual exclusivity of, on the one hand, keeping Philoctetes on board, and on the other hand performing the right religious offerings. From this angle, Philoctetes antagonizes the practice of Greek culture. By corollary, Philoctetes is understood as someone lacking a sense of propriety and civilization. As Bernard Knox argued in 1964, Odysseus and the other Achaean soldiers are scared by Philoctetes' cries because to them they sound like animal sounds. More animal and less human, Philoctetes seems to them less similar to themselves. Philoctetes' foot infection becomes the reason for uncontrollable screams of pain. It is this uncontrolled and uncontrollable aspect that is deemed the most disturbing. Austin writes that social exclusion is

172 Soph.*Ant*.1008-9 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 294).

173 Susannetti (2012), 19.

needed when Philoctetes' treatment-resistant pain tries the limits of human patience, and of human ingenuity. For Austin, this is when "society's horror (…) must make the diseased person into a monster to preserve the purity of the tribe".[174] Philoctetes' condition exemplifies the failures of medical science to help him, and of society to be kind. Neoptolemus might see in Philoctetes how he could one day be treated by his peers, should he ever have the misfortune of falling so ill. A grand silence and awkwardness engulfs their first encounter. Neoptolemus remains silent for a long time. It is Philoctetes who attempts to coax a few words out of his youg visitor.

> καὶ μή μ᾽ ὄκνῳ
> δείσαντες ἐκπλαγῆτ᾽ ἀπηγριωμένον,
> ἀλλ᾽ οἰκτίσαντες ἄνδρα δύστηνον, μόνον,
> ἔρημον ὧδε κἄφιλον κακούμενον,
> φωνήσατ᾽, εἴπερ ὡς φίλοι προσήκετε.[175]
>
> Please do not be taken aback by the fear of as reviled and savage a man as me, but take pity on someone so unfortunate and alone, deserted, and unloved, someone who calls out to you. Do please speak, if indeed you come as friends.

To all this, Neoptolemus says nothing. At the heart of this difficult contact lies not only Philoctetes' physical disease and his current state of health, but also the social exclusion which has gone on for so long it has left its mark on both Philoctetes and the surrounding group. Philoctetes' condition exemplifies the end of human ingenuity. This produces estrangement. The conceptualization as an only animal furthers the acceptance of one's own action, which is to exclude the person formally.

174 Austin (2011), 222.

175 Soph.Phil.225-29 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 304).

3. *Homo Sylvaticus*: bête noire outside town

Philoctetes' wailing entails a reduction to the bestial, tantamount to crossing over into a non-human species. “For the Greeks, to be civilized is to be human rather than bestial”,[176] stipulates Segal with reference to Aristotle's *Politics* I.1253a2-7 (ὁ ἄπολις διὰ φύσιν καὶ οὐ διὰ τύχην ἤτοι φαῦλός ἐστιν, ἢ κρείττων ἢ ἄνθρωπος: “he who is citiless, by nature rather than by accident, is either a very bad man, or a very great one”). Odysseus, with his explanations of the situation for Neoptolemus, deliberately creates an impression that Philoctetes is a beast-like human of the worst order. Throughout the prologue and all the way into the heart of the play, an image draws itself up of Philoctetes as a savage island-dweller who lives in this tunnel-like cave amongst the uncultivated vegetation and fauna between the jagged cliffs. This lifestyle, which looks more bestial than human, is presented as evidence that he has become savage, inside and out. Kosak argues that the Philoctetes depicted here lives in a sort of 'pre-civilized' existence,[177] like that described in the Hippocratic corpus. The fact that Philoctetes eats raw rather than cooked food counts as a marker of his pre-civilized existence. Several critics have highlighted that descriptions of Philoctetes' eating, for instance the verb βορᾶς (274) refers to the way that people eat when they are reduced to their savage state. It is Philoctetes himself who talks about this, disproving of the folks who left him with this sort of food for sustinance. There is also φορβῆ (43, 162, 706, 711,

176 Segal (1981), 11.

177 Kosak (2006), 55.

1107), which has the same connotation of animals feeding.[178] For Philoctetes, all this is a debasement that he can survive, but in his mind he suffers. In his study of the so-called "Ode to Man" in *Antigone*, Utzinger inspects the current distinctions between man and animal, savage and civiilized, how one is deemed superior to the other, and master of it. Utzinger calls into view Hippocrates' theory of how at first, mankind had to suffer many hardships when they were still eating raw and unprepared food. People who were on a raw food diet, according to Hippocrates, were more vulnerable to various diseases, and those with the weakest constitutions even died as a result of their poor diet. Stronger built people could resist for longer; but everything changed when man developed a *techne* (εὕρειν τὴν τέχνην) to help himself be healthier. That indeed was the invention of the cooked food diet.[179] Leaning on this information from Hippocrates, Utzinger maps out ancient distinctions between savage and civilized, human and animal etc. They are recognizable by complex and codified practices. The civilized man's dietary code, for instance, highly rates cooked food and advocates it over raw food. It also forbids cannibalism. Segal has made an extensive list of the codes that distinguish savage from civilized in the ancient texts:[180] for the civilized man, incest is taboo; not having this taboo means to be "savage". Next to sex and nutrition, Segal also calls into view the ethical codes that exist between men of honour. Legal regulation, orderly fighting, and the beautiful heroic ideals stand in contrast to the animal world's *modus vivendi* where unregulated aggression and the brute force of beasts decides who wins.

178 Avezzu (2003), 195.

179 Utzinger (2003), 150-1.

180 Segal (1981), 35.

Philoctetes is re-conceptualized as an animal through the filter of all of these categories. Odysseus engineers this deprecation of his human worth, and intends to deal with Philoctetes like a man dealing with an animal. He intends to conquer him like a beast, even though he is still always a man. Ultimately, Odysseus and the other Achaeans will be the ones guilty of uncivilized behaviour. Philoctetes' rebranding as a wild animal – which is not true to the reality but is a construct that has been superimposed upon him – leads to a behaviour on the part of the other men which is, in its turn, objectively bestial and uncivil(ized). We understand the artificiality of the entire ideological construct, especially in the light of the fact that Philoctetes himself is aware of the whole ruse. That awareness explains his reluctance to return to his military duties and to commune with the others. For Segal, "every aspect of Philoctetes' status as a civilized man is ambiguous",[181] because he both hunts beasts and is devoured by an illness that is itself like a beast gnawing at him, because he walks upright but limps, because his walking is characterized as feral (214). Although we find Utzinger and Segal's charts of the contrasts between civilized and savage useful, we can not agree that Philoctetes' status as a civilized man is ambiguous. In fact, it is not ambiguous at all if we take Philoctetes' own utterances just in themselves. The impression that Philoctetes has reverted to a pre-civilized or savage state is produced through the tricks of Odysseus' rhetoric. Odysseus has his own motives for casting Philoctetes in the role of a wild beast. It makes it more permissible for him to pile in and simply take what he wants from Philoctetes without asking for permission, forgiveness, or anything, quite like in the *Odyssey* he does on his arrival at

181 Segal (1981), 297.

Polyphemus' house. Despoiling Philoctetes of civilized attributes also minimizes the need for empathy and conveniently allows Odysseus and other men to feel that they have done nothing wrong in leaving Philoctetes all alone on Lemnos for a whole decade. What is more, once again, the causality chain is topsy-turvy. Philoctetes has become as disheveled, as rugged-looking and as limping in his walk because he was neglected for such a long time by his community, and not vice versa. Ambiguity of Philoctetes' civilized status might exist amongst the characters of the play. But there should be no ambivalence among the audience, because firstly we can see the full picture, and secondly we can guess that Odysseus has ulterior motives why he deprecates Philoctetes so much in his descriptions.

As a second example, also *Oedipus Coloneus* shines a spotlight on the problematic reception of a diseased body in society. The decrepitude and disease-strickenness of this formerly royal body is only difficultly accepted by the community of villagers. They can see he is noble; but they can certainly also see that he has suffered various mutilations and is also worn down by old age and some kind of mental derangement as a result of his shock. As Theseus advises him, Oedipus' story is so famous that he is recognizable from afar. His destroyed physical appearance makes him unmistakeable.

> πολλῶν ἀκούων ἔν τε τῷ πάρος χρόνῳ
> τὰς αἱματηρὰς ὀμμάτων διαφθορὰς
> ἔγνωκά σ', ὦ παῖ Λαΐου[182]
>
> Having heard from many and since a long time
> of your eyes' bloodied lacerations
> I recognize you, son of Laius

182 Soph.OC.551-4 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 380).

Oedipus will answer Theseus with the explanation that he is aware his body is οὐ σπουδαῖον εἰς ὄψιν ("not pleasing to the eye"). But beyond appearances, Oedipus informs Theseus, there could be an interesting profit in store for the city that receives him, lets him purify himself of his sins, and perhaps even offers him a spot in its cemetery.[183] Even this part of the narrative has parallels with the scenario in Phiiloctetes: there is something useful, something valuable, in store for him who takes in this damaged body. Philoctetes has the bow and archery skills, and he also has an ancient prophecy going for him; Oedipus knows that he has something useful to offer, but we are not yet how exactly receiving him and his body will benefit a city. At any rate what is certain is that Oedipus will have nothing more to do with Thebes.

> δώσων ἱκάνω τοὐμὸν ἄθλιον δέμας
> σοὶ δῶρον[184]
>
> I am here in order to offer my wrecked body
> to you as a gift

Not only the gouged-out eyes, by which Theseus had recognized Oedipus, but also his old walking impairment that he got at birth when his parents mutilated his feet, contribute to Oedipus' overall appearance. The mutilation of his feet, and Oedipus' early abandonment in the woods, become an integral part of the wilderness rhetoric underlying his characterization. The discourse that can always identify Oedipus by his mutilations, that calls attention to these mutilations and gives them prominence, does more than only illustrate a situation, it also brings Oedipus nearer to the animal world, and by the same token further away from

183 For discussion of the “usefulness”, see Bernek 2004: 153-7.

184 Soph.OC.576-77 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 381).

humankind. Similarly to how such a discourse had stripped Philoctetes of some of his rights as a human being, this discourse too threatens Oedipus with loss of his aristocratic identity, with exclusion from the benefits and amenities of living in a civil society. It threatens the man's disappearance in the cruel world of animal existence, kept at arm's length and outside the town, or enslaved under the dominance of other men. Even as the king of Thebes, Oedipus could get pushed into this corner. Had he not already in childhood managed to survive the assault on his feet and the dumping in the bushes outside Thebes. No-one expected that he could survive. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, it is clear to the parents that little baby Oedipus could not possibly have survived the assault at birth:

> παιδὸς δὲ βλάστας οὐ διέσχον ἡμέραι
> τρεῖς, καί νιν ἄρθρα κεῖνος ἐνζεύξας ποδοῖν
> ἔρριψεν ἄλλων χερσὶν εἰς ἄβατον ὄρος.[185]
>
> The child's age was not three days,
> when this man bound up his feet at the joints
> And threw him out of his hands, into impervious hills.

Oedipus anyhow did survive in these hard circumstances, if only because he was never fully exposed to them. Through the kindness of the man entrusted with disposing of the baby, Oedipus was saved that time. His body in adulthood still bears the marks. Also, he is freshly bleeding from his latest self-mutilation in the face is about to be re-assigned to the mountains when he is discovered to be this wild man from the mountains that they are all looking for. Now, expulsion impends for Oedipus, a kind of second coming of his exposure to the wild animals outside of Thebes or return to a place where he has been before. For

185 Soph.OT.717-20 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 148).

Oedipus, imagery of mountains and their dangerous wildlife flash up at defining moments when his exclusion comes into the focus: that time he was banished as a baby, that other time when he was matched with Tiresias' description of a wild man from the mountains; and then, in the remonstrances shown to his family in O. C.

We can continue to read this in parallel with *Philoctetes*, where the place of abandonment is an island described as impossible to walk on. The finality of the abandonment is clear. No-one can ever chance upon Oedipus, or Philoctetes, for they have been placed in locations where no-one can arrive. This is especially true of *Philoctetes* where the entire scene-setting functions as an intrinsic characterization of Philoctetes. Someone who lives on the rugged isle must be himself quite rugged, this is the reasoning that Odysseus and the chorus put forth in *Philoctetes*. Roman Jacobson stipulated the existence of the metaphoric and metonymic poles in language.[186] If metaphor is a way of making a point by exploring similarities, metonymy is based on contiguity, on the conceptual alignment of two things as connected to each other intrinsically, on the basis of them being next to each other, or, as the case may be, one inside of the other. In this reasoning, because Philoctetes lives on a desert island, his character is intrinsically the same. The rugged wilderness haunted only by predators, that so prominently underscores the events in *Philoctetes*, becomes symbolic of Philoctetes' character and emotional inscape. In the manner of a global and pervasive metonym, Lemnos, the place that has no harbor and is uninhabited since the last barbaric carnage, simultaneously is a description of

186 Jacobson (1956) , 76-82.

Philoctetes himself. He is “all alone” (ἔρημον, 228),[187] and “has become brutal” (ἀπηγριωμένον). In the metonym, the man Philoctetes, like the island Lemnos, exudes abandonment and cultural regression. The rhetorical construct of metonym helps explain everything about Philoctetes in a nutshell : his mental state and character equals a desert island full of ferocious beasts and uncultured vegetation. It conceptualizes Philoctetes as an endemic part of Lemnos, and dispenses with the prospect of mutual understanding through civil dialogue. With metonymy, an attribute of the object is used to signify the object, the cause or the effect are talked about in order to signify the thing itself. Philoctetes' location on Lemnos and the wilderness of the place are used to summarize everything about Philoctetes. As we will now see, this metonymic discourse goes as far as denying that Philoctetes is a human. By animalizing or bestializing Philoctetes, and by imputing an extreme degree of wildness, the metonymic discourse strips away Philoctetes' humanity.

The island's description as “difficult to dock in” and “not lived in by men”, applied to Philoctetes’ personality by metonymy, produces strange effects. How can Philoctetes be "deserted by man"? Parhaps Odysseus means that Philoctetes is zombified and internally so deranged, he is just a shell of a man. In this view, Philoctetes is a man's body, that continues to be alive, but is devoid of the soul and character that used to inhabit this body. In *Ajax*, it is the hero's madness that has estranged his peer group into excluding him, thinking Ajax is not Ajax any more. What was left of Ajax was no longer identical to the Ajax they had known. Even Ajax does not recognize himself, and begins to understand himself as the robotic vessel of an evil spirit. Appearing to be

187 Schein (2013) :it is “more emotional” than *monos* alone (164).

possessed by demons, characters such as Oedipus or Ajax look to their peer group as if they are having their actions remote-controlled by a demonic power. This implies that their own soul or *dianoia* (thought and character in drama) has disappeared. In other words, the implication is that there is no human spirit left. Philoctetes lives alone and isolated from civil society in a place which, with its total lack of cultural resources and unsanitary living conditions, is more an un-place than a place. Both Oedipus in Colonus and Philoctetes experience this condition of being outcast and finding themselves alone on rough terrain. For Guidorizzi, their outer appearance—bodily mutilations, being clothed in rags—sends out strong visual signals to anyone who sees these unfortunate characters, that they have moved very far away from the aristocratic background from which they once came.[188]

The effect is a reduction of empathy. Emotional distance grows, and self-identification with this person dwindles. To the other warlords, Philoctetes ceased to appear as an *alter ego*. He is viewed with suspicion, like a wild man or an animal. Philoctetes lives in a bubble of no-man's-land, in the place that is "not to be gone to", an un-place for un-people. The bestialization of Philoctetes through Odysseus' narratives is the gateway to the supposition that Philoctetes' inner self no longer exists, which in turn gives *carte blanche* to treat him differently than if he was human. They are about to use brute force against Philoctetes, which would normally be shocking and reprehensible. Yet, the prior conceptualization of Philoctetes as a beast or at least as a wild man, makes onlookers more accepting of the idea that violence will be dealt. Since wild men or beasts are not worthy of

188 Guidorizzi (2008), XX.

civilized ceremony, the conditions are apt for a takeover by force and, if needed, the use of violence like one would normally not accept for use on humans. In this context, the use of violence is 'culturally comprehensible', as Provenza writes,[189] and Odysseus' aims in his bestialization of Philoctetes are now also completely clear. Odysseus engineered a transformation of Philoctetes' social image, so that he could violate Philoctetes' rights and disregard his personhood in order to force Philoctetes into compliance, rather than getting his consent.

Visually, it is possible also in *Electra* to find a comparably dishevelled, neglected and unrecognisable aristocratic body, this time female, who has trouble recognizing her own brother and being recognized by him. Her failure to recognize Orestes is explained by his disguise as a stranger, and the recent (false) news of Orestes' death, whose ashes the stranger purports to carry with him. But Electra needs no disguise to be unrecognisable. He asks her:

> Or. ἦ σὸν τὸ κλεινὸν εἶδος Ἠλέκτρας τόδε;
> El. τόδ᾽ ἔστ᾽ ἐκεῖνο, καὶ μάλ᾽ ἀθλίως ἔχον.[190]
>
> Or. Is yours the famous face of Electra?
> El. That's the one, though I'm not well at all.

Wanting to know if the face belongs to Electra is certainly a very roundabout way of asking if she is Electra, but the confused logic is perhaps a sign of Orestes' incredulity, or at least uncertainty, that this really is his sister. He is visibly upset to learn that she is indeed Electra:

189 Provenza (2013), 68.

190 Soph.El.1177-9 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 105).

Or. ὦ σῶμ᾽ ἀτίμως κἀθέως ἐφθαρμένον.[191]
Or. Oh body, so shamefully and godlessly harmed

After "face of", it is now "oh body": one wonders if Orestes is having trouble connecting the body with the memory of his sister, appearance with the reality. So deep are the effects of Electra's long abandonment by the royal household, Orestes' reaction is disbelief at how his sister's appearance has changed. Electra herself had already set up an image of herself as a woman undone, in fact a woman on the verge of the abyss. Worman's study has shown how Electra's mourning for Orestes is so extreme, it implies a self-identification with being dead. Although Electra's is only a symbolic death, she has abandoned care for herself in the form of self-grooming or of maintaining appearances of an adequate social standing. She has completely disappeared in the mourning of departed family members. As Worman argues, she shows all the signs of a life "melting away" (187) in the life of a beggar or a slave.[192] That life is withering for her, as it is for Oedipus in *O.C.* or Philoctetes. These three characters are all not accustomed to the life of poverty, and for them it represents a major fall from grace. Through exclusion from a household, from an army, or from a whole town and its dignitaries, all three of these characters have continued their descent into an even worse state than the one they had been in when they were first expelled from their structures. In modern parlance we might say "they let themselves go even more". Electra's grave dishevelment and self-neglect lets her look, in the end, like death personified, or almost.

191 Soph.El.1181 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 105).

192 Worman (2015), 85.

The story of Philoctetes' uncontrolled moaning and of his growing decrepitude showed how the person becomes excluded in function of an incommensurate expression of pain. This happened in the absence of Orestes, yet the transformation is complete by the time they meet again so that Orestes can appreciate it on arrival.When Orestes arrives, his reaction is much more compassionate than its counterpart in *Philoctetes*, where Odysseus plan is to abuse Philoctetes' situation for his own ends. For this, Odysseus is set to over-write Philoctetes' original identity with a new identity as an animal, or, at least, a regressed-to-pre-civilized human, in short, a wild man. Odysseus operates the trope of bestialization in advance of Neoptolemus' meeting with Philoctetes, and the result is that Neoptolemus will be exceedingly anxious about approaching Philoctetes and speaking with him. The same we may say of Athena's preparation of Ajax for Odysseus' benefit. In Philoctetes, the bestialization in Odyseeus' discourse entails a justification of the domineering, unsavoury and perhaps even abusive course of action taken towards Philoctetes. Persuading himself and others that Philoctetes is not the same as he was, and since animals may and should be treated in a more utilitarian way than humans, it follows that so will Philoctetes be treated in a utilitarian and dominant way (rather than an egalitarian way). "The bestialization of human beings is often associated with tyrants in tragedy", writes Ringer, and lists examples of Creon in *Antigone*, Aegisthus in *Agamemnon*, and Pentheus in the *Bacchae.* Ringer finds these three all to use images of animal taming as a way to describe their relationship with their subjects.[193] This effect certainly also applies to Odysseus' way of handling Philoctetes, and Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus towards

193 Ringer (1998), 136.

Electra, in *Electra*. The identification with Odysseus as a tyrannical personality may be indirect, since Odysseus focuses on speech and persuasion as a way to deflect attention from the idea of using naked force. Yet, Odysseus' persuasion strategy is a form of violence, because it aids putting Neoptolemus in the right frame of mind for hurting Philoctetes. By producing an impression that Philoctetes is little more than an animal, a remnant of what once was a human being, he sets up the authorization for further violence to happen with impunity.

4. Tyranny and bestialization

These are examples of the 'bestialization' of an unacceptable person and how it can be a useful rhetorical device. Bestialization as a psycho-social construct can accompany the perceived change, and ultimate rejection, of a person in society. The idea that someone has just regressed and turned into a wild human or bestial human, offers a convenient ideological justification for social exclusion. Sophocles has laid it out on stage in all its glory. It clearly is a controversial tactic that brings a degree of dishonour on the speaker who uses it, as it is always attributed to tyrannical, overbearing and unsavoury behaviour and ideas. For instance in *Antigone*, Creon's utilizes the trope of bestialization to help himself conceptually justify his use of violent punishments reserved for those who do not follow his laws. He worries about a conspiracy that might be held against him somewhere. For Creon, this simply means some men are not properly harnessed to his service.

> κρυφῇ κάρα σείοντες, οὐδ᾽ ὑπὸ ζυγῷ
> λόφον δικαίως εἶχον, ὡς στέργειν ἐμέ.[194]
>
> Shaking their head in secret, their necks were not held under my yoke and honouring me in the just way.

In reality there was no conspiracy, but merely Antigone attempting to bury Polyneices. But at this moment, Creon is not yet sure of how it happened, and believes unknown conspirators are to blame. His intuition that there are an unknown number of conspirators who secretly oppose his rule, taken together with the

194 Soph.Ant.291-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 195).

imagery of yoking and thus domineering, is an indication of Creon's psychological worry that somewhere, outside of his vision field, there are such men. Creon then paints his relationship with his subjects in rather undemocratic colours: animal metaphors and horse taming similes are a strong part of his repertoire. When he learns that it was Antigone who did it, and did it all by herself, he once again has recourse to the animal domination imagery. He speaks of bending Antigone's will like of taming of horses:

> σμικρῷ χαλινῷ δ᾽ οἶδα τοὺς θυμουμένους
> ἵππους καταρτυθέντας[195]
>
> I've known unwieldy horses being put straight by a small bit

Creon's paranoia, his exaggerated suspicion and anger are of a similar calibre to the anger of Oedipus, which can only be described as a quick temper. But the best comparison is surely Aegisthus, who, like Creon, lives in fear of secret opponents. Like Creon is against a funeral for Polyneices, Aegisthus plans to deck out for Orestes quite the opposite of a good burial. Like Creon, Aegisthus is quite sure that the corpse still is the person, and thus Aegisthus gets ready to punish, hit and mutilate the dead Orestes. The action is simultaneously to serve as a deterrent to other supposed conspirators in the city.

195 Soph.Ant.477-8 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 802).

πᾶσιν Μυκηναίοισιν Ἀργείοις θ᾽ ὁρᾶν,
ὡς εἴ τις αὐτῶν ἐλπίσιν κεναῖς πάρος
ἐξῄρετ᾽ ἀνδρὸς τοῦδε, νῦν ὁρῶν νεκρὸν
στόμια δέχηται τἀμὰ[196]

for all to see, Mycenians and Argives,
how if one of them holds vain hopes
that he could have been saved by that man, now he can see the corpse
getting my bit in his mouth

Aegisthus makes ready to display the corpse of Orestes in a shameful manner for all to see, as a public warning for other prospective usurpers of his power. Like Creon, he employs this same animal taming trope for his purposes.

These examples are just a few small tokens showing the reprehensible, unsavoury side of bestialization as a rhetorical trope. Its use implies that the speaker thinks he is the overlord—and that is of course never popular. The audience is not expected to align itself with the idea that the tragic protagonist has become bestial, and there is nothing more to do about it. Rather, the audience is invited to inspect the dark side of those in control, who operate such tropes of bestialization and put themselves above a weaker or an injured party. Far from satisfying itself with attributing uncivil and uncivilized behaviour to the protagonist and acquitting everyone else from all blame, the discourse of bestialization is fissured with negative connotations. It is possible to trace instances of rhetorical bestialization in every play, Philoctetes foremost.

196 Soph.El.1459-62 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 116).

5. Polyphemus

Reflecting this back to Odysseus' bestialization of Philoctetes one last time, comparison springs to mind with how Odysseus overpowers mythical creatures in the *Odyssey*. Stories of overpowering giants, dragons or horrid hybrid dogs are told in a celebratory tone in the Odyssey, giving Odysseus the appearance of one who can take on opponents greater than himself. When Odysseus lands on Lemnos in *Philoctetes*, there may be many resemblances that call to mind his homeric landings, yet the Philoctetes they will find on Lemnos is no monster. He is just a sick man. The Lestrygonians, cyclopes, witches, sirens and sea-monsters of which the *Odyssey* is a catalogue all fall in the conceptual domain of the monstrous and outsized, threatening, cannibalistic, repulsive or destructive menaces to a safe homecoming and even just bare life. The beginning of *Philoctetes* offers a vista akin to an Odyssean island landing. It even zooms in on dialogue about practical matters and the logistics of Odysseus' arrival.[197] The reminiscence of the *Odyssey* and its explorations sets up expectations that a similar encounter will take place now on Lemnos, in particular scholars have highlighted the many reminiscences of Odysseus' encounter with—again—Polyphemus.[198]

197 Schein (2013), 153: “Philoctetes is *deinos* ('strange and terrifying') because of his wild and isolated existence and invincible weapon”.

198 “The Cyclops and the Satyr, the gargantuan mouth and the gargantuan phallus, are the two major types of Greek homo ferus” (Greengard 1987, 58); see also Brilliante (2009).

Of course the *Odyssey* is not all.[199] Euripides' *Philoctetes* has been compared with Sophocles' version (from 409 BCE) since ancient times. It appears that the stage set with the cave was already featured in the earlier, Euripidean *Philoctetes* (dated at about 431). It is also known that Euripides' satyr-play *Cyclops* shared the identical set design featuring a cave as dramatic location. The *Cyclops*, as one may expect, dwells on the farcical effects of primitive life in a cave, and beyond the commonalities of set design, Euripides' *Cyclops* and *Philoctetes* were shown to have many internal resemblances.[200] The nexus between Philoctetes and Polyphemus, then, is already established in the Euripidean forerunner to Sophocles' *Philoctetes*. Between nudging the audience's perception in the direction of expecting a character similar to the dreadful Polyphemus and the references to a very visible disease, Philoctetes' body begins to look to the others like quite the abomination. His disease is conceptualized not so much as an acute and temporary affliction any more, but turns into his nature, permanently keeping him separate and fundamentally different from the others.

Such a conceptualization has its moral consequences, for example Odysseus' decision on how to treat him. Philoctetes is no ogre or semi-ogre, but just a man, but Odysseus is planning to outwit Philoctetes with similar tactics as he used on Polyphemus in the *Odyssey.* Conceptually, the reported character of Philoctetes gets pushed in the direction of looking like a bestial wild man. Philoctetes becomes a wild man, although he was not always one. This is why, presumably, he and others exert on him the normative

199 Schein (2013), 116, suggests an analogy with Calypso's island for example, based on the adjective *perirrutos.*

200 Schein (2013) 17; Greengard (1987) 56ff; Segal (1981) 297ff..

gaze of medical treatment, always with one (doubtful) eye to the possibility of his recovery and his becoming once again the man he used to be, and to perform the functions of the heroic warrior, for which he was schooled and prepared his entire life.[201] Polyphemus and Philoctetes both are presented with an emphasis on how much their existence departs from the norm of civilized humanity. This departure takes on a monstrous dimension in the case of Polyphemus in the *Odyssey*, and a 'bestialized' one for Philoctetes. Sophocles' characterization of the egregious protagonist does not go as far as painting him as a monster in the style of Odyssean ogres, sirenic hybrids etc. None the less, literary parallels are discreetly superimposed upon the text of *Philoctetes* to blur together the diseased Philoctetes, and the monstrous Polyphemus.

Recognizing this story line as a fundamental plot structure rather than an isolated one, we can then see how the re-conceptualization of a person hinges on a rhetorical construction of superiority versus inferiority. In the *Cyclopeia* we can certainly recognize such an assertion of superiority in Odysseus' brandishing of his greater shrewdness and use of elaborate schemes. Levering medicinal and technical knowledge,[202] Odysseus overpowers Polyphemus. Marianne Hopman writes, “Odysseus' intelligence is (...) set into relief by contrast with the Cyclops who is too “stupid” to “understand””.[203] Even though

201 Beye (1970), 67.

202 Giulia Maria Chesi stressed the significance of technical knowledge in addition to the more commonly cited ruse or cunning of Odysseus in this episode, in her talk at the Humboldt University in Berlin in 2015 .

203 Hopman (2012), 37.

Polyphemus is hard done by, the reader is encouraged to rejoice in his injuries. Polyphemus has been sufficiently delineated as a horrible cannibal and an enemy of culture for "us" to do so. Still, Polyphemus is a sentient being, subjected to an unnecessarily sadistic blinding by fire, and is able to attract sympathy. Newton has outlined Odysseus' disregard for the *xenia*-ritual and his aggressive, arrogant behavior. Odysseus has not even tried to follow the rules. He assumes from the very beginning that any act of civilized humaniy will be wasted on Polyphemus, and for this reason he instructs his men to enter and take what they need. The Cyclops has what seems like a very orderly household inside his cave, with rows of home-made cheeses neatly stored. But none of this, for Odysseus, is a reason to stick to the rules of host and guest. For the audience, it is possible not to be blinded by the description of how monstrous Polyphemus was, and to ponder simply if Odysseus did not make a faux-pas by simply entering the cave and helping himself. With this doubt already on one's mind, one wonders if Odysseus could have done something a little bit less drastic and less sadistic than to blind Polyphemus with burning wood. There is a savage side in Odysseus and his ruses, that comes out through actions such as these.[204] As Newton wrote, our admiration of Odysseus' ruses, courage and how effective they are, comes tainted with "reservations about the folly of (...) his actions".[205]

In *Philoctetes* even though Philoctetes is no beast or ogre, his human form is tentatively painted as brutish and horrific. Odysseus' plans to outwit Philoctetes on Lemnos without consideration to his wishes betoken the same conceptualization of

204 Newton (1983), 137-142, 139.

205 Newton (1983), ibid., 138.

the man Philoctetes as a wild beast devoid of fine reasoning faculties. In this reckoning, Philoctetes' possession by a paroxysm, Ajax's possession by insanity, and so on, are gateways to becoming reduced to one's own animality. This in turn leads to a moral evaluation and demotion to a lower status.

The shared story line between Ajax and Philoctetes does not contain an animal transformation myth. Instead, it portrays the subject's invisible transformation in the eyes of all, followed by loss of social appreciation, *as if* a metamorphosis into a beast had actually happened. The audience is to understand that the bestial characteristics are unacceptable; but of course animal characteristics do inhabit every human, every person. The exploration of bestiality in the human person, and attempts to define the boundary between animal and human, is certainly a theme that we can ascertain here in the case of Ajax and Philoctetes. Of course, this motif exists not only in the work of Sophocles, but ancient literature and mythography much more widely.[206] The explicit, and so to speak "naive" representation of an animal metamorphosis is a frequent motif in Greek literary texts. To stay with Sophocles, in *Tereus* or *Inachus*, a we find examples of such an animal metamorphosis (Tereus, Procne and Philomela are transformed into birds. Io is transformed into a cow). Explorations of bestiality in the human, or explorations of the boundaries between human and animal like we can see them in *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* might be considered one step behind the description of a real and manifest metamorphosis into an animal. They can, in any case, be considered part of the same complex of fictional explorations that inspect the boundaries betweeen human and animal, human and monstrous even. In the examples of Ajax

206 Aston (2014), 371.

and Philoctetes, the aspect of not just bestiality but also monstrosity certainly comes into play through association with the literary Polyphemus.

Transformation of a human into an animal has for consequence their absolute exclusion from all human dealings, and with this, they are cut off from the enjoyment of civil liberties, civil treatment, the respect of social norm and form by one's fellow citizens. As animals, they become vulnerable to a variety of ill treatments such as captivity, hunting, exploitation, and so on. “Bestialization”, i.e. the characterization of a human as an animal with the intent to deprecate their worth, sends more than one Sophoclean protagonist on a journey from social acceptance to social exclusion. Philoctetes once was well integrated into society, "a prince within the community, a noble and honored warrior", as Badger writes.[207] But things have changed, for him. This point we may well also extend to Ajax, Polyneices, Orestes, Oedipus, to the women Electra, Antigone, and Deianeira (as we will do in the ensuing section and sub-sections).

As a result of the transformation, an insurmountable social unacceptability seems to have arisen. The former glorious identity is gone, the new one causes nothing but trouble : Philoctetes is morbidly ill and impossible to manage, Ajax becomes a madman, Heracles is sick with an impure sex drive, and so on. They begin to look like monsters.

We can now recognize exclusion as a process of transformation rather than a permanent state; and as a fundamental plot structure that appears and re-appears in Sophocles.

207 Badger (2013), 35.

6. Disease as transformative change

The role of disease in this transformative process is worth highlighting. More than once, it is a disease that sets in motion the transformative process. Deteriorating health and changes in behaviour will eventually become so dramatic that the individual is set very far aside from the rest of the group and therefore it is almost possible to speak of a transformation. There certainly is, if not a transformation into an animal, a change in appearance, in behaviour. Within the space of social appreciation and interactions, a change takes place that is equivalent to a real transformation (also sometimes called 'naïve' transformation). The cause for Philoctetes' abandonment – and similarly of Electra's – is not the straightforward fact of an illness, but the illness' uncanny implications. Electra exhibits symptoms that one might say match Hippocratic descriptions of epilepsy or the sacred disease. Philoctetes' wound, despite medical men's best efforts, is not healing well, and Philoctetes' pain is out of control. For Freud, it is precisely this that defines the uncanny: when doubts grow as to whether a living person might perhaps be dead, or inversely whether a dead person perhaps is alive, the uncanny takes hold. Freud gives the example of an epileptic fit, how it grabs a person and gives rise to the impression of an automatic process.

Such a psychological process is at the heart of the estrangement which Sophocles portrays again and again between diseased and tragically tainted individuals and the community around them. The excuse that Philoctetes' loud moaning was disrupting the prayers conceals a deeper fear: firsty of catching the same disease.

Secondly, fear and abhorrescence may be psychological reactions to Philoctetes' strange and unclassifiable state just in between life and death. By his illness, Philoctetes (and so too Electra, Oedipus, Ajax, or Heracles) comes to represent and personify the illness itself, which inhabits him like a parasite and is threatening to take over his life. The community looks for reasons to disown him or her and, as some have said, to re-assert its own identity, its limits of what or who can be included, and what can not.

Remonstrances made by the victims of this estrangement are almost futile. We have discussed above how Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus* adopts an accusatory tone against those who have excluded him, and Philoctetes does similarly.

In all the extant plays, Sophocles rarely slips into the un-realistic, fantastical, or surreal and naïve metamorphoses are rare. There is the evidence from *Tereus* and *Inachus* suggesting that Sophocles by all means did elaborate the literary motif of animal metamorphosis. However, just as much it is observable in the extant plays how Sophocles employs realism, only to play with the symbolic plane and the allegorical meanings of realistically described events. In *Antigone*, Polyneices appears to continue to have the power to cause havoc in Thebes, even as a dead man. There is, certainly, the question of social appurtenances and the morality of burying him; but at the same time, there is something else: the putrefaction of his corpse just outside the city gates is a public health hazard, quite prosaically. Tiresias angrily tells Creon that he must have it buried. The corpse is emitting an airborne infection, a contamination that is causing all manner of damages in the city. Particles of Polyneices' rotting flesh have been carried into the city by the winds, blowing contaminated dust into Thebes, and bits of flesh have been ferried inby birds who have

been in contact with the corpse. In this way, the unburied remains of Polyneices spread ill health, folly and doom in the city. So realistically portrayed is this process, it is in fact compatible with the Hippocratic theory of *miasma* as airborne infections. Thus Sophocles' text is, in one sense, hyper-realist. But hyper-realist detail does not preclude metaphoric meaning from existing in the same place. Of course it is true that Philoctetes actually has a disease. On the other hand, his disease is only truly significant when it is contemplated as an allegory of all that is feared and abhorred, and absolutely impossible to absorb within society. It is this undercurrent of symbolic meaning that ties together many of the figures in similar schemata, not only with regard to their involvements with disease, but also with regard to their fall from grace in the community, beholden to expose some fundamental social dynamics and the tragic side of social fears.

In *Trachiniae*, a metaphorical way of speaking about Heracles' sex drive as a disease gradually melts into a not at all metaphorical narration of Heracles' fatal disease. The disease of Heracles in *Trachiniae* is explainable from a socio-historical point of view (in fact, two interpretations are competing: that he succumbed to corrosive acid used in clothes dye, and that he died of an epidemic disease such as the bubonic plague). However, so intricately is this disease tied up with Heracles' love life that it would be impossible not to notice its highly symbolic meaning. This symbolic meaning unfolds in parallel to the literal meaning of his sickness. The two planes of meaning converge at times so closely that it is difficult—and perhaps not necessary—to distinguish between both avenues of reading. The determinism of Heracles' literal disease seems to advance in unison with the determinism of his misplaced erotic energy. The symbolic disease of Eros has, by

the end, entirely melted into the course of a physical disease. Both end at the same time. Even more so in the Theban plays, symbolic and actual meanings of disease converge to an infinitesimal degree, as was discussed above. Through the medium of an illness that can as much be symbolic as it is actual, characters go from man to beast. They are turned from a valued member of society into a rejected character who seems beast-like and horrific, or, worse, monstrous.

Subtle and understated sets of suppositions drive these conceptualizations, not in the style of a full-blown metamorphosis or supernatural event, but in a kind of mutated version of the transformation myth, where the poetic memory of various monsters, dragons and their hybrid cognates from Greek mythology rears its head in the tragic character's profiling. This is how myth and fiction enter the portrait of a social reality.

V. Sexual Rejections

Now that we have contemplated some almost-transformations through disease, we must swiftly go about reading Sophocles' presentations of naïve metamorphosis. In reality, the fragments of *Tereus* and *Trachiniae* both show scenarios of exclusion between partners, in the form of erotic rejections that take on much grander proportions, threaten to shatter the individual's very existence and destroy them.

1.1. Rejection (1): *Tereus*. Metamorphosis as social expulsion

Fragments of *Tereus*, to which we shall come presently, show up metamorphosis as a departure from humanity into the world of fantastical supernatural events, and by the same token, a departure away from human society. On the whole, Sophocles' known work does not all that prominently feature myths of transformation. The epic material that underwrites nearly half of Sophocles' work of plays concerned with the Trojan war (though only two plays are preserved) only sparsely deals with supernatural occurrences in the way that, say, the *Odyssey* does and as further narrative threads from Greek myth do. Notwithstanding that overall impression, a smattering of instances do feature transformation myths in Sophocles' fragments, such as in the sentence "you shall no longer talk in human fashion with this person!" from an unknown play in fr., thought to dramatize Circe speaking to Odysseus about the companions who became swine.[208]

In *Tereus*, the cast is transformed into birds and lives on in avine form. As a result of her animal shapeshifting, Procne's lament will become sublimated into the song of birds, which can not seriously disturb the listener, as Deianeira's speech does. Yet, Procne's continued moaning in the form of nightingale song will become part of an uncanny tapestry of forest imagery that haunts many literary forests in Greek poetry, and so too in Sophoclean tragedy. One thinks of the grove at Colonus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and its

208 Lloyd-Jones (1996), 365.

prefigurations in lyric and epic, which again and again infuse the imagery of Sophocles.

Gregory Dobrov observes that, like in many metamorphic tales, the metamorphosis into a bird in this scenario is equivalent to a social death that, in terms of audience expectation, satisfactorily supplants a murder, suicide or other event of tragic death. The death wish implicit in the idea of 'would that I were a bird', for Dobrow, "would make quite natural the association of this desperate tableau of metamorphosis-in-crisis with the scenes of death that had already been presented in the *ekkyklema*. Thus Sophocles would achieve a counterpoint of sorts between this final image of the unfortunate "birds" and his audience's expectation of a death scene".[209] In short, Tereus' metamorphosis into a bird perfectly enacts his removal from society, and the metamorphosis comes as a result of actions deemed unacceptable for members of the community. In fact, in fr. 589, the chorus explains that the two women must also be transformed into birds because they have taken an unacceptably violent and uncivilised course of action:

ἄνους ἐκεῖνος· αἰ δ' ἀνουστέρως ἔτι[210]

He is witless. But they are even more witless

They sinned against Tereus by killing Procne's son, serving him up to Tereus as food, thus inducing Tereus to commit an act of cannibalism, on top of the rape that he was already guilty of.[211]

209 Dobrov (2001), 115.

210 Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick & Talboy (2006), 170.

211 See Coo (2013), 368; Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick & Talboy (2006), 153; Irwin (2007), 61-2.

Doubly turned into a man of monstrous actions, Tereus has to disappear, as the myth seems to imply.

Both with Deianeira and with Procne and Tereus, the understanding is that these scheming tricksters who thought they could take justice and destiny into their own hands, are severely punished for their acts of deceit. We may note that this stands in contrast to the actions of Athena in *Ajax*, who is shown here just like Deianeira or Procne as someone scheming cunning tricks of deceit, but her status as Athena is surely the discriminating element that puts Athena's intervention into human destiny above divine retribution. Yet, apart for the divine nature of Athena as the instigator of the deceit on Ajax, there is no noticeable difference between her behaviour and the behaviour of, say, Deianeira seeking to influence the mind of Heracles in order to regain his affection. But let us stay with the myth of Procne and the *Tereus*: the transformation of the women into swallow and nightingale is presented like a protective measure from sure death at the hands of Tereus, should he discover what their intentions were. At the same time, this transforms Procne's lament over her lost child into a bird song, and makes it impossible for her to vocalize it in discursive terms. That myth is acknowledged to be at the origin of an eerie nightingale's song that pierces through many poetic woods, a symbol that meaningfully populates tragic forest imagery.[212] It is found for instance in *Oedipus Coloneus*, as Antigone leads her sightless father into the mysterious sacred grove at Colonus. She describes it for his benefit as the most idyllic and richly efflorescent meadow, yet it is filled with the song of nightingales that disturb its peaceful silence:

212 Across several writers by Suski (2001), 646ff.

ὅδ᾽ ἱερός, ὡς σαφ εἰκάσαι, βρύων
δάφνης, ἐλαίας, ἀμπέλου: πυκνόπτεροι δ᾽
εἴσω κατ᾽ αὐτὸν εὐστομοῦσ᾽ ἀηδόνες:[213]

This is a sacred place, as it seems, shooting
with laurel, olive and vine. Entangled in one another,
and all throughout it are warbling the nightingales

That the nightingales sing through such a densely vegetated grove seems like a natural event of birds in their natural habitat, yet at the same time the myth of Procne's transformation overshadows the experience. Guidorizzi notes the similarity of this description to that of the grove of the Eumenides in the Oresteia (Eum.916-1020),[214] recalling the cult of these subterranean deities. Associated with flowers and rich vegetation, in the scene at Colonus, disquieting presences are lurking in this peaceful wood at Colonus. As Guidorizzi has written, there is a hidden life that is quietly germinating here, creating appearances of a place of mystery, rather than the unreconstructed and squarely savage woods described for example by the space by of Philoctetes' cavern.[215] This grove at Colonus, where the tired and decrepit Oedipus will take his seat, will be the centre around which the dialogues revolve. Here Oedipus will pronounce his curses on his sons, which will not fail to come true. The chorus in *Antigone* calls on an "Erinys of the mind" that gnaws at the furthest root of the Labdacid family. For the audience, that already knows *Antigone*, Oedipus' damning words here spoken in this place of mystery will be invested with the heavy significance of how, in *Antigone*, this damnation will come into effect. Here in this uncanny place, that has the power to make curses come true,

213 Soph.OC.16-19 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 357).

214 Guidorizzi (2008), 205.

215 Guidorizzi (2008), 206.

Oedipus himself will eventually be swallowed by the earth. The sound of a nightingale's melancholic singing accompanies these events unfolding all along, and it prepares, modifies and tints these scenes with an uncanny and ill-foreboding ring. Not so much the visual aspect of the animal transformation, but the loss of a human voice and discursiveness is the salient aspect of Procne's metamorphosis in *Tereus*. Mirrored in other versions of the myth by the mutilation of Philomela's tongue, the gruesome part is the mutation of Procne's lament into unintelligible animal sounds that henceforth every tragic forest can hear, but never understand. The cry of nightingales appears with the laments of Electra over Agamemnon's death, overshadowed as they are by a dubious prohibition to mourn, and overshadowed too by the knowledge that the murderers are living happily and with impunity.

> ἁ παῖς οἶτον ἀεὶ πατρὸς
> δειλαία στενάχουσ', ὅπως
> ἁ πάνδυρτος ἀηδών,[216]
>
> The daughter, continually bewailing the father's fate
> is miserable, moaning, just like
> the ever-grieving nightingale

Though this is a powerful symbolism from the perspective of the initiated hearer who knows this secret significance, for the woman who had to swap human language for animal sounds of indecipherable meaning, it is not necessarily a happy resolution. Electra realises the obsessive nature of her grief and its negative appreciation by the environment of subjects of Aegisthus. Electra is threatened in the play that she could soon be locked away in a

216 Soph.El.1075-77 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 101). Also note Storr's reading of 1075: Ἠλέκτρα, τὸν ἀεὶ πατρὸς

dark room where her laments would only come out in muffled sounds, alike to Procne in her nightingale form that stylizes her banishment from the community. A similar attitude frames Philoctetes' outbreak of illness and his temporary emission of unintelligible noises, that frightens away the Achaeans and makes them think he has transformed into a beast. Equally, at the end of *Ajax*, when the Atridae want to do away with Ajax and Teucer both, they accuse Teucer of talking in an incomprehensible tongue. The attempt to exclude Teucer hinges on linguistic unintelligibility, even a contrived rather than actual (and indeed soon retracted) unintelligibility.

The lonesome 'birdified' Tereus on his hard rock for his part resembles the ailing and abandoned Philoctetes on his rocky island. As Jennifer Kosak's inquiry into the status of Philoctetes in the role of the diseased hero has yielded, the transformation of a male body by the advent of disease is on a par with a loss of masculinity. “A sick man in Greek tragedy will normally be characterized by feminine attributes—indeed, he may even call himself a woman, as Heracles does in Sophocles' play *Trachiniae* (1075). Given such a strong social predisposition to associate disease with the feminine, it would be difficult for a sick character such as Philoctetes not to be seen automatically as somehow emasculated.”[217] Of course, neither Philoctetes nor Heracles do actually transform into women. By contrast to Tereus, who will find himself shape-shifted into a bird, Heracles will come dangerously close to actually being “the animal in him”, yet he never fully be it; even his final demise remains cryptic as the questionable apotheosis of Oedipus in *Oedipus Coloneus*.

217 Kosak (2006), 54.

Opinions diverge on whether Heracles' death in *Trachiniae* leads to his apotheosis;[218] and as regards the health condition to which he succumbs, opinions diverge on whether it represents a case of the plague, of chemical poisoning, or is of a purely symbolic nature inspired by fairy-tale magic. Through the intermediary of his life-long career in ridding the (fictionalized) civilized world of dangerous beasts and monsters, Heracles becomes himself at long last identified as one of them. As one who was an even match to defeat monsters, nothing short of a monster could defeat Heracles in his turn. That he now succumbs to symptoms of a disease therefore must mean that the disease is a monster. By corollary, since the illness is inherent to his body, we are to understand that a monster lives inside Heracles. If it lives in him, it is only one more leap of reasoning until we see that Heracles is, himself, this monster. Heracles *is* the disease. In his final hour, Heracles becomes inextricably entangled and confounded with his disease. The disease, for its part, is conceptualized like a snake or dragon: it is a disease that devours him with venomous voracity. This is the interpretive key offered by Jouanna. Heracles' struggles with death are read as the terrible spectacle of the monster-killer, himself defeated by a monster inside of him.[219]

218 On this, see Goldhill (2012), 16.

219 Jouanna (2007), 412.

1.2. Rejecton (2): Deianeira's horrific husband

Deianeira, his wife, not infrequently suggests that Heracles' nature is somewhat monstrous, long before he falls prey to this sickness. Aside from the play's numerous references to Heracles' fights with monsters, one particular struggle is lifted out of the multitude by Deianeira and the chorus. It is the one that Heracles himself does not include in his own dying monologue. This fight is his struggle against Achelous. Deianeira presents Achelous thus:

> ὅς μ᾽ ἐν τρισὶν μορφαῖσιν ἐξήτει πατρός,
> φοιτῶν ἐναργὴς ταῦρος, ἄλλοτ᾽ αἰόλος
> δράκων ἑλικτός, ἄλλοτ᾽ ἀνδρείῳ κύτει
> βούπρωρος:[220]
>
> In three incarnations did he ask me from my father,
> raring in the appearance of a bull, and another time as a glistening,
> winding serpent, and once as an ox-head
> with a man's body.

The ability to metamorphose, the hybrid body form that is one of the three results, the confusion of identity created by this ability to appear in different forms, all carry an undertone of preternatural uncanniness. Deianeira's tale of how Achelous could appear to her in three different forms underlines how his actions, and the entire situation, surely eluded human ingenuity, and meant that she was helpless in the circumstances. Enter Heracles, who was able to tackle this creature as his opponent. His ability to do so puts Heracles in the same league with the feared Achelous, and thus the terrifying, almost spell-binding attributes are transferred on to Heracles as he emerges victorious from his fight against Achelous.

220 Soph.Trach.10-14 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 241).

Easterling observed already that the details of Achelous' metamorphosis emphasize the monstrosity of Achelous and his courting practices.[221] They are first and foremost magical without being necessarily monstrous. But it is clear that the reception by Deianeira of such fantastical abilities is that they are a monstrosity, and human resourcefulness and ingenuity pale before such magic tricks. Everything here focuses on Deianeira's viewpoint. We find ourselves contemplating first and foremost the apprehension and anxiety that overcomes her during her contact with such forceful characters—both Achelous and Heracles. Under this lens, Deianeira was so scared of these two, that she preferred not to watch their fighting: possibly an even more potent way of conveying the horror of it than an actual description might be.[222] As a result, Deianeira is forced to convey an impression of how the fight went, but without a direct description. The effect is, of course, that the listener's terror is heightened by this knowledge that an awful fight between two larger-than-life characters occurred in a blind spot of Deianeira's consciousness, yet must have been so astonishing to behold. Conveniently, the chorus of Trachinian maidens were much less squeamish, and watched the fight. The chorus then retells this story in an amplified manner (498ff.). Yet another detail is included by the chorus: the description of how Deianeira did not look. Even though she was present in situ, she turned away, as we were just saying. This gesture of looking away, itself, holds the seeds of Deianeira's negative evaluation and judgement: they are both disgusting, and to see both together in close combat would be an abomination. Polymorphic ruses, extreme violence, and unheard-of techniques

221 Easterling (1982), 74. See also Clarke (2004), 97ff.

222 Hall (2009), 69.

are abominations that Deianeira prefers never to see, never to remember. We may say with Falkner: “This counter-image becomes an interpretive gesture”.[223] The implication is that Heracles, who stepped up to the challenge and defeated this monster, must be similarly worthy of rejection from humankind, and certainly does not belong with the community of men and women. At least in Deianeira's view it is clear that Heracles, the monster-killer, is himself a monster.[224] With this, we are returned to our crucial issue: the monstrosity of Heracles as a criterion for his exclusion, and Deianeira's disgust and fear of him and of his erotic advances. Deianeira makes intimations of rape in her youth, and that Heracles led a purely reproductive sexual relationship with her during her childbearing years. The marriage is not only devoid of familial affections, it also fails to bestow the socio-economic advantages that marriage could have promised a newly-wed bride: Heracles has planted Deianeira in some town that is not their home (Trachis), no family alliances are in place to give Deianeira a comfortable position in society. She is simply on her own in an unknown land. The intimations of Heracles' monstrous fight with Achelous and Deianeira's loveless early years of marriage with Heracles following this event, can give us an idea of how much Deianeira had, in reality, always abhorred Heracles. Despite these feelings, Deianeira did not reject Heracles physically, and the listeners are given the idea that this happened mostly because she saw herself in a position where she had no choice and tried to make the best of an awful situation.

To better inspect the theme of reprehensible *Eros,* the *Tereus* fragments and their study have shown that the play circled around

223 Falkner (2005), 173.

224 Sorum (1978), 64.

the subject of rape, its turpitude and the animal transformation as its moral consequence. The fragments have been reinstated to such an extent that readers can now see that the play included a narrative messenger report sequence describing the transformation of Tereus, Procne and Philomela into three birds. It is thought that a *deus ex machina* was employed to convey the story of this supernatural event. Fitzpatrick writes that the *exodos* of Tereus had a *deus ex machina*, and fragment 581 describes the metamorphosis of Tereus into a hoopoe.[225] One sees not only a visual description of the man who will henceforth mysteriously "show two forms from a single womb, his child's and his own":[226]

> δύο γὰρ οὖν μορφὰς φανεῖ
>
> παιδός τε χαὐτοῦ νηδύος μιᾶς ἄπο[227]

The tone of delivery also attributes to Tereus a sense of great misery and bitterness in this situation, recalling the tone and word choices at times used by Philoctetes. We glean a literary vignette of the transformed Tereus now living on a "hard rock" and "in full armour", and the loneliness of this sylvan life intensely appears as a punishment.

Tereus, famously, raped and maimed Philomela, but Heracles' exploits in and away from the marital home may not equate to rape. They are first and foremost a breach of his marital vows (provided he made these vows), and perhaps, pulling in the description of his exorbitant physical power, a hint of sexual overpowering of women. Like a proto-feminist critique of marriage to a "macho" man, the text is dotted with points of

225 Fitzpatrick (2001), 98-99.

226 cf. Lloyd-Jones (1996), 290-92.

227 Sommerstein, Fitzpatrick & Talboy (2006), 169.

critique vis-a-vis classic gender roles where the man dominates and the woman submits: the insufficiencies of this model come out through Deianeira's discontent, and worse (as we will argue). Everything in Deianeira's words suggests that her anguish before Heracles, whom she associates with monsters in her mind, was more fit for an encounter with a dangerous beast than with one's own husband. In the early parts of the play, she lets on that, as much as she finds Heracles terrible, she is also worried that he is never coming back. She is worried in her isolation, and about her isolation, feeling pushed out of her own life and living in a vacuum she loathes. She has oracular prophecies to heed, tied closely to the timing of Heracles' comings and goings, and worries what might have been happening to Heracles in his absence.[228] Knowing that this precise moment in time, and the city of Oechalia, were prophesied to mark important turning points of Heracles' life, she makes heard her fears that something awful could have happened.[229] This means that, despite possible misgivings and intimate feelings of distaste against him, Deianeira acts as a loyal wife to Heracles. She defends the interests of and remains loyal to a man who is by her own description monstrous, and who made her his wife based on winning her at a contest. In his capacity as the legendary Heracles, he does not have a solid social status, or a rich household to offer Deianeira. Since Deianeira is herself a woman of aristocratic descent, we can assume that this is a major material loss, and especially a social setback for Deianeira. Deianeira really is left out of the norm of society and floats in a precarious and borderline hostile sphere as a guest in the town of Trachis. We need only compare Deianeira's

228 Soph. *Trach.* 46-48 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 243).

229 Soph. *Trach.* 176-7 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 247).

marriage with, for instance, the alliance formed in *Antigone* between Haemon and Antigone. Despite Creon's very great anger and disappointment with Antigone, he intends for all purposes to marry his son to her, for strategic reasons (discussed above). In the same way, in *Antigone* we hear of the marriage between Polyneices and Argeia, which is heavily frowned upon by all involved but is none the less understood as a strategic marriage with strong economic and social backgrounds. That Deianeira could not find any other prince charming besides these monstrous creatures who fought over her is the first mark of her fall from grace with her own society. That Deianeira's father was happy to hand her over to so weird a type as Heracles, so disinterested in wealth and so remote from nobility, bears an unhappy undertone, as if her own father was rejecting her, as if her whole family had thrown her out of the family circle. This would explain why she will later find herself playing roulette with his life and send him a gift of which she is not entirely sure what it contains. It also explains why she predominantly feels sorry for Iole as Heracles' current girlfriend, and lets us suppose that her outbreak of jealous feelings later on is only half-genuine. If her jealousy of Iole was genuine, we may assume that so was her intention for the love charm to work as a love charm. If it was false, we may construe it as an alibi to cover up her true lack of care for the welfare of Heracles in sending him a gift drenched in a dubious potion. Ultimately, Deianeira rejected Heracles already on their wedding day, but is trapped in the situation and has scrambled to make it turn out for the best. Yet, the bottom line is that she is only Heracles' wife because she was forced to be. Heracles' sexual appetite, Deianeira explains, is “sick”: although critics may point to her self-interest in this assessment, it is possible to see in the

portrayal of Heracles many aspects of a moral judgement that makes him as undesirable and worthy of social exclusion precisely on account of his enormous sex drive. The fragment 583 of *Tereus* is a lament addressing the difficult position of a woman given in marriage to an abusive husband (fr. 583). It certainly bears a comparison with some of Deianeira's distressed laments in *Trachiniae*. *Trachiniae*'s treatment of Heracles' sex life is not exactly flattering, as it is told from his reluctant wife's point of view. It begins with a νυμφείων ὄκνον (fear of wedlock, 7-8), and the statement that ἐγὼ μνηστῆρα προσδεδεγμένη / δύστηνος αἰεὶ κατθανεῖν ἐπηυχόμην, ("dreading such a suitor,/ unhappy, I always wished I would die" 15-16).[230] Deianeira who is, in all, a so-called ordinary woman, repeatedly confides her fear of Heracles, and bemoans the instability of her living situation, caused by Heracles' many commitments to monster killing and his accordingly long "business trips", during which she has to live alone, as well as frequent house moves. She says about their wedded life:

> κἀφύσαμεν δὴ παῖδας, οὓς κεῖνός ποτε,
> γῆτης ὅπως ἄρουραν ἔκτοπον λαβών,
> σπείρων μόνον προσεῖδε κἀξαμῶν ἅπαξ.[231]
>
> "And we bore children, whom yonder man
> like a husbandman who took on a far-flung field,
> only looked upon once, in sowing, and then again in the reaping.

The verb σπείρων both connotes sowing seeds in farming, and a father begetting children; the long time in between the sowing and harvest sprawled across the longest part of a year, and even more

230 Easterling (1982), 73.

231 Soph. Trach. 31-33 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 242).

so the long period between one's children being born and the time when one can "reap" something from them, are both able to sustain Deianeira's complaint of her extreme loneliness in the household. Greek writers sometimes disguise references to sex in references to agriculture. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*

> γυναῖκά τ᾽ οὐ γυναῖκα, μητρῴαν δ᾽ ὅπου
> κίχοι διπλῆν ἄρουραν οὖ τε καὶ τέκνων.[232]
>
> the wife who was not a wife and mother who
> was the field for two sets of kids

Heracles had a habit of impregnating Deianeira and then leaving by herself for extended periods of time. Her married life has left her somewhat dysphoric. One might read this image as explicitly sexualized, and this reading would make Heracles look like the caricature of a coarse husband, undermining the paramount seriousness of the tragic genre. The frequent mention of Heracles' extraordinarily brutish and ultra-masculine nature offers a gradient of contrast against which the women's world defines itself. A 19th-century sense of propriety had an important part to play in the negation of a sex theme in *Trachiniae*, as in the negation of the interest of reading *Trachiniae* altogether. When Sir Richard Jebb wrote his commentary on this passage, he must have had the hypothesis of sexual undertones in mind, for he emphatically negates their presence: "the (...) simile (…) leads the poet to employ a phrase adapted to the special case of the γῆτης. (…) the γῆτης sees his distant field only twice a year. But it is not meant that Heracles visits home just twice a year", Jebb stresses. And: "The point (...) is merely the rarity of the visits. (…) Nor has

232 Soph.OT.1255-7 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 169).

κἀξαμῶν any figurative application (…) It is an irrelevant detail".[233] A similarly ambiguous farming simile at 69-70.

Deianeira reminds Hyllus that it is not right for him to be happy not to know where his father is. But Hyllus explains himself, saying that he is up to date with the latest rumors: "for the last ploughing season, the whole time,/ he slaved for a Lydian woman, they say". This Lydian woman is queen Omphale (252). Jebb comments with the same fear of detecting a sexual reference that "Two tragic poets of the fifth century B.C., Ion of Chios and Achaeus, had written an *Omphale Satyrike.* Two poets of middle comedy, Antiphanes (Athen. 112 C) and Cratinus jun. (id. 669 B) wrote an *Omphale*, picturing Heracles abandoned to sensuous pleasures. It is the more noteworthy how Sophocles, in lightly touching on this episode, has guarded his hero's dignity. For he speaks only of servile labours for the Lydian taskmistress, and marks how the bondsman felt his disgrace".[234] Heracles' gargantuan sexual appetite and fabled long absences from his own home and family are popular tropes in Greek mythology and *Trachiniae* makes no exception of this. However, in *Trachiniae*, as I will presently argue, the sex theme has a decidedly tragic quality (as one might expect). Even though Heracles has huge potential for comedy, the *Trachiniae* is a tragedy of sex. *Trachiniae* has been de-sexualized for a long time, but it is useful, now that academic books are more permissive of sexual content than the Victorian schoolbooks were, to restore our vision of some of its sexual themes. Sex really does have a major importance for our understanding of this play and its psychology. From our own, admittedly rudimentary, reading of the psychological forces at

233 Jebb (2004), 10-11.

234 Jebb (2004), 42.

work (rejection, cover-up, power-play between the genders, socio-economic value of marriage and status symbolism), we may draw conclusions on the psycho-social processes that engender the exclusion of Heracles and of Deianeira, both separately and together.

The marriage to Heracles excludes Deianeira from living in the style to which she had all her life been accustomed to. Deianeira decides to take away Heracles' good reputation, by exposing—or perhaps recasting—him as a monstrous husband who is more or less a marital rapist. It is not merely Heracles' construed monstrosity that engenders his social exclusion. Heracles' monstrous side is compounded by Deianeira's erotic rejection. He may overrule her rejections by his bodily strength, and also by mere intimidation; but this in turn allows Deianeira to drench her entire depiction of Heracles in tones of moral turpitude. This could well be the origin of her decision to strike up a discourse of monstrosity around Heracles. The unhappy marriage is, quite possibly, not so much the result of Heracles possessing certain monstrous attributes, as vice versa: Heracles' monstrosity becomes discernible to Deianeira especially through her experience of a bad marriage. It is as a result of this, and not before, that Deianeira sets up Heracles for total deprecation and banishment from the ranks of the decent folk, capitalizing upon super-human attributes that were, of course, always already a part of Heracles, but needn't have been understood directly as horrific or monstrous. As we may add, the sex theme here has nothing satyric or comedic.

It gets worse, of course: Deianeira is occasionally compared to the Aeschylean Clytaemnestra at the beginning of *Agamemnon*, mostly by virtue of her position in waiting for the husband's

return, and also in her capacity as the eventual murderer of this husband. Whereas Clytaemnestra's intent to kill Agamemnon is all too clear, in *Trachiniae*, Deianeira's intention to kill the husband is far less clear, and perhaps not at all existent. Deianeira will have killed her husband by the time he reaches her doorstep. But, by contrast to Clytaemnestra, Deianeira has hatched a scheme that makes it impossible to know if Heracles' death was an accident, or was intended murder.

Like *Agamemnon*, the structure of *Trachiniae* falls in with the "nostos-plays",[235] i.e. plot structures revolving around the hero's homecoming. Heracles' is an aborted *nostos*, i.e. the hero encounters adversity and dies before he manages to return home to his wife.[236] Deianeira is not precious about her husband's erotic relationships. When Heracles' young concubine, Iole, is introduced in front of her house, she comments: τὸ κάλλος αὐτῆς τὸν βίον διώλεσεν – "the beauty of her has destroyed her life" (465). In this wry assertion, compassion for this young woman who now has to endure Heracles' sexual advances outweighs any feelings of jealousy. Deianeira had, in her youth, also feared that her beauty might ruin her life (25), and in her opinion, her fears came true. In speaking with the chorus of Trachinian maidens, Deianeira wishes for them that they may not have to learn the hard way what marriage is really like (μήτ᾽ ἐκμάθοις παθοῦσα νῦν τ᾽ ἄπειρος εἶ, 143). The life of these young women of Trachis is, in Deianeira's eyes, sheltered and well cared for, like the well-watered young shoots that grow in their own special patch. This life is gentle and wonderful, until such time as the young woman swaps being called a girl for being called a wife,

235 Kratzer (2013), 23-4ff.

236 Kratzer (2013), 31.

and the terrors begin.[237] This, in short, would be the jist of Deianeira's take on marriage.

Coo has compared this line of thought from Deianeira with the lament of Procne in *Tereus.* Both times, older female voices contrast their own troubled situations against the protected, light-hearted happiness of their girlhood. In fact, both generalize on the concept of female youth and then evoke personal experiences, framed by "references to her own "torment of the soul" (142) and an appeal to an unspecified third person to sympathize with the "evils" which oppress her", writes Coo.[238] A major difference lies in the outcomes, or at least so it seems. Procne will be transformed into a bird, which certainly does not happen to Deianeira. She, by contrast, reaps stern criticism from all sides for her opinions and for her constant moaning, and as a result she winds up completely isolated.

> λόγος μέν ἐστ᾽ ἀρχαῖος ἀνθρώπων φανείς,
> ὡς οὐκ ἂν αἰῶν᾽ ἐκμάθοις βροτῶν, πρὶν ἂν
> θάνῃ τις, οὔτ᾽ εἰ χρηστὸς οὔτ᾽ εἴ τῳ κακός:
> ἐγὼ δὲ τὸν ἐμόν, καὶ πρὶν εἰς Ἅιδου μολεῖν,
> ἔξοιδ᾽ ἔχουσα δυστυχῆ τε καὶ βαρύν,[239]
>
> There is an old saying current among people
> that you may not understand the life of mortals before
> they die, not if it's good and not if it's evil.
> But I know my own, even before having gone to Hades,
> I know I have got only bad luck and aggravation.

It breaches the convention of common sense to want to forego waiting for the end and already declare one's life a failure. Deianeira knows this, but does not want to betray her own feelings, which happen to be these feelings of utter desperation.

237 Soph.Trach.144-50 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 247).

238 Coo (2013), 375.

239 Soph. *Trach.* 1-5 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 241).

This lack of self-restraint majorly confuses the chorus of young women, who find Deianeira's sustained pessimism overbearing. She perseveres. The elderly nurse, again, provides another point of comparison, by comparison to which Deianeira appears like a loose cannon. The servant knows her place, so to speak. Deianeira, the ageing aristocratic lady in a borrowed home, the wife of a man who has no regular identity, is not well-integrated in any kind of social fabric here. The chorus attempt to tone down the sharpness of Deianeira's existential dilemmas. Advice like εὐφημίαν νῦν ἴσχ' ("now, speak with decorum", 178) is dispensed throughout, accompanied by general precepts to keep up hope because Zeus is supposedly always kind.[240] These precepts obviously go over Deianeira's head.

At the play's opening, Deianeira is already quite far remote from her home comforts and located in a peripheric *locus desperatus*. As mentioned already, the marriage to her unusual suitor Heracles failed to cater to the classic schema of a noble alliance. It has dragged Deianeira away from her family and the social networks of her home town. She has no function and has been discarded as a companion. Having whisked her away and transplanted her home temporarily to the new grounds of Trachis, Heracles has all but abandoned her.

Deianeira's opening monologue strikes up the depressing thought that she is certain her life is completely doomed, even though an old proverb says one should always wait for the whole life to have gone by before it is possible to judge it, but the environment point blank refuses to accept her point of view. She is misunderstood, even though she earns occasional sympathy. Men speak to her in a way that betrays a manifest inequality: they withhold information

240 Soph.Trach.139-40

from Deianeira, thinking that a woman can not handle bad news. In fact, she receives two different versions of news regarding what exactly Heracles has been doing away for so long. Hyllus' version accords itself with Lichas' story, but it is only half-true. In Heiden's words, the herald's narrative "represents Heracles' violence as a necessary and just punishment of the Oechalians. Or rather it *appears* to represent Heracles' violence but does not, in itself, clearly represent anything".[241] And that is the problem: both tales are misleading. Both accounts are clumsily charged with sexual undertones owing to the traditional tale of Heracles and Omphale. In Trachiniae however, it so happens that Heracles' enslavement to Omphale was *not* coupled with any erotic encounters, but instead is intended as a cover-up of his latest love affair with Iole. It certainly makes for a strange cover-up.

But Deianeira will have none of it: "not to be informed, that is what would aggrieve me./ What is so awful about knowing?" It will take a set of strong arguments about the moral importance of telling the truth (449-59) to persuade Lichas that he should tell Deianeira the truth, and that she is capable of handling it. He obliges at last.[242] Then begins the tale of the true love story between Heracles and Iole, followed later by Deianeira's recognition that Iole's presence spells her own destruction.

Glancing at Iole, her youthful rival in love, Deianeira muses: "what secret bane have I received under my roof?" (376-7), and then:

241 Heiden (1987), 53.

242 Soph.Trach.473-4.

κόρην γάρ, οἶμαι δ᾽ οὐκέτ᾽, ἀλλ᾽ ἐζευγμένην,
παρεισδέδεγμαι φόρτον ὥστε ναυτίλος,
λωβητὸν ἐμπόλημα τῆς ἐμῆς φρενός.[243]

A maiden—or I think no longer a maiden, but a mistress—
have I received here, like a freight to a sailor,
a merchandise that is nefarious to my heart.

The identification of Iole with a nefarious delivery "to the heart" is so singular, it warrants pause. We may surmise that the idea of a poisoned delivery is designed to mirror Heracles' situation outside of the city, where he will shortly get his very own poisoned delivery from Deianeira. Deianeira's missive to Heracles will carry the blood of her ex-lover, Nessus, as its agent of destruction. Heracles instead is sending his current girlfriend, named Iole perhaps significantly, because in the name is hidden the word for "poisoned arrow". De facto, with Iole, Heracles is sending Deianeira her doom. To refer to Iole as a maiden at first, quickly to correct herself and call her "a mistress", has an insulting aroma, that portends Deianeira's anger at the situation. Even to think of Iole as "goods" delivered to her is a sign that Deianeira has taken this arrival personally, and takes it to heart.

Similar insults are thrown also at Electra, Antigone and Ismene, particularly because they are unmarried girls. Far from contemplating them as lovingly tended little plants, Creon, full of indignation against his nieces, slurs Ismene and Antigone as vipers. He shouts that he didn't know he was raising two nasty vipers in his house, instead of two girls:

243 Soph.Trach.536-38 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 262).

σὺ δ᾽, ἢ κατ᾽ οἴκους ὡς ἔχιδν᾽ ὑφειμένη
λήθουσά μ᾽ ἐξέπινες, οὐδ᾽ ἐμάνθανον[244]

The suggestion that this 'viper's poison is secretly sucking out the blood of his life and soul, is shared by Clytaemnestra in *Electra*. Similarly here, as the unmarried girl in the house who does not act in an agreeable manner towards the parents and other elders, Electra is spoken of as a parasitic disease. Electra, they say, drinks from the well of human lifeblood.

ἥδε γὰρ μείζων βλάβη
ξύνοικος ἥν μοι, τοὐμὸν ἐκπίνουσ᾽ ἀεὶ
ψυχῆς ἄκρατον αἷμα[245]

This girl is the greater evil
she lives with me and always drinks
my life and blood, undiluted

A snake is imaginable underneath this mention of a parasitic disease, from the image of someone sucking blood from the veins.[246] So too in *Trachiniae* Deianeira begins to understand that Iole could be the agent of her death. On the one hand, Deianeira sees no reason why Heracles' affection would not be directed towards any other woman besides herself.[247] On the other hand, Iole's appearance has conveyed to Deianeira how superfluous her existence really is; a realization that will turn out to be lethal to her husband.

Deianeira speaks as if she knew that she no longer really exists. She is still alive, but in reality, Deianeira has disappeared. She may not have physically turned into a bird, like it happened to

244 Soph.Ant.531-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 204).

245 Soph.El. 784-6 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 90).

246 Finglass (2007), 344.

247 Soph.Trach.444-48; 459-62 (Lloyd-Jones 1991: 259)

Procne. But for all other purposes, she is as alien from the community as a forest bird would be. Perhaps further proof of the similarity between these two plot lines is that like Procne succumbs to the same fate as Tereus—an avine metamorphosis—so too does Deianeira single-handedly end her life in the moment she knows she has killed Heracles, in an attempt to keep their deaths aligned. Iole may be the personification of Deianeira's end. Yet, because Deianeira had at first contemplated Iole's beauty and noted how much they both resembled one another, the profuse self-identification leaves us to suppose that Deianeira too has a destructive potential in her. Not only figuratively but also literally, Deianeira has been hiding a deadly poison all these years. One thinks of the Trojan horse, in which the Argives "brought murder and fire to the Trojans" (Τρώεσσι φόνον καὶ κῆρα φέροντες, *Od.* 4.273), and which Odysseus drove into Troy "as a deceit" (Od. 8.489 ὅν ποτ᾽ ἐς ἀκρόπολιν δόλον ἤγαγε δῖος Ὀδυσσεὺς). In this concept, a seemingly beautiful gift turns itself into a weapon of destruction and combustion from within. In his last breaths, Heracles curses her as the "δολῶπις Οἰνέως κόρη" ("deceitfully-faced daughter of Oineus"). Heracles clearly thinks Deianeira used a ruse. Perhaps he knew that secretly, she wanted to kill him. If Iole was like a Trojan horse to Deianeira, Deianeira is the same to Heracles. The dyed garment will be accepted by Heracles as a kindly gift, but it burns him out, insidiously pushing a concealed enemy into him, just like Iole had been pushed into Deianeira's home. A network of symbolic correlations starts to establish itself in the minds of readers. Heracles, the dragon-slayer, is slain by a dragon, who is disguised as the agency of Deianeira, who is herself stung by the poison of Iole's appearance as a "ship of doom", and armed with the venom of Nessus' blood, which had

been poisoned by the Hydra's blood, whom Heracles had killed. There is an infinitely extending web of correlations here. It binds together the divided experiences of the married couple through a set of associations that makes them both equally outlandish to their neighbors, and makes them both monstrous. Both are dragged outside of normal humanity; Heracles because he had always been in an ambiguous state, and Deianeira avails herself of out-of-bounds attributes by her use of poisons and magic.

The entire business of sending Heracles the love charm is imbued with references to magic and witchcraft that could well abut on to supernatural transformation. According to the description, it could sound as if Heracles is being devoured by a flame. But symbolically, we are to understand that it is Nessus, Deianeira's spurned lover, coming back from beyond the grave to take revenge at last in the form of a lethal disease. The nemesis can be traced further back: Nessus was killed by Heracles. He died of the poisoning from Heracles' arrow, which had been dipped in the blood of the Hydra—whom Heracles had killed in another struggle. Ultimately, it is the Hydra who takes her revenge on Heracles, via Nessus also taking his revenge on Heracles, via Deianeira taking her revenge on Heracles. I would not be the first to observe a similarity with the robe Medea sends off in Euripides' *Medea.*[248] The dispatch of the robe in *Trachiniae* is framed in a number of ritualised behaviours and laden with a combination of

248 Mayor (1997), 56 notes similarity in details of the deaths of Herakles and Glauke, concluding some real but visually flashy phenomenon involving fire must have inspired these legends. Insight into the ancient manufacture of clothing, use of caustic substances as dyes, highly volatile compounds that "could ignite at very low temperatures and continue burning even when wet—especially if the fabric had been stored in a sealed container, such as a chest with a close-fitting lid" (p.57)

ancient nemesis, oracles and curses. The poisoned robe is certainly traceable to material culture, but it is also a trope of fiction, and perhaps of folklore. For instance, Deianeira had requested of Lichas when she handed him the casket with the shirt for Heracles: μηδ᾽ ὄψεταί νιν μήτε φέγγος ἡλίου /μήθ᾽ ἕρκος ἱερὸν μήτ᾽ ἐφέστιον σέλας[249] ("let it not be seen by the light of sun,/ nor out at the sacred enclosure, nor by the flame of a hearth"). We understand that this potion, concocted from the blood of Nessus, has been kept in darkness the whole time. The rhythm of Deianeira's instructions is marked by the repetition of the particle μη, reminiscent of a mnemonic poem, such as a magical incantation.[250] Susannetti highlights the blind faith with which Deianeira, an otherwise well-advised character, carries out the preparations of her gift according to ancient instructions. Her ceremoniousness, he argues, fortifies our impression that the entire story of the poisoned cloak is formulaic and symbolic, framed by a host of equally formulaic and symbolic details.[251] As Deianeira explains later to the chorus, the centaur's commands had been to keep "this tincture always away from fire, kept in elderwood,/ untouched by warmth and to keep it safe in a recess" (τὸ φάρμακον τοῦτ᾽ ἄπυρον ἀκτῖνός τ᾽ ἀεὶ / θερμῆς ἄθικτον ἐν μυχοῖς σῴζειν ἐμέ)[252]. When Deianeira was outside and casually threw away the tuft of wool she had used to anoint Heracles' new garment, she saw something strange happen to the tuft: "as it warmed up,/ it dissolved and became invisible, it erased itself into

249 Soph.Trach.607-8.

250 On magic in *Trachiniae & Medea*, see Susannetti (2011) 62-69; Ogden (2013), 53-4.; 208.

251 Susannetti (2011), 65.

252 Soph.Trach.685-6.

the ground/ and looked very much like sawdust" (ῥεῖ πᾶν ἄδηλον καὶ κατέψηκται χθονί, / μορφῇ μάλιστ᾽ εἰκαστὸν ὥστε πρίονος, 697-9)—an ominous portent. Deianeira's account of how the wool shriveled into dust is only a taster of the far more dramatic account of Heracles' demise to come.

Deianeira's superstitious missive will prove to be her own undoing. If we compare this further with Procne and Tereus, the magic quality of the love charm sets up a vague expectation that Heracles might perhaps transform. Heracles is already always on the cusp of a magical transformation, simply by virtue of being of such an ambiguous nature and physical constitution. Deianeira sends a dubious love charm to him, Procne a meal of human flesh. Tereus and Procne become metamorphosed; in *Trachiniae*, both sides of the love charm are killed. Heracles dies of the poisonous substances, that are also spiritual justice traced back to the Lernaean Hydra whose blood is part of the recipe. Deianeira more figuratively dies from the psychological venom of welcoming Iole in her heart and realizing that Iole's arrival had envenomed her. Deianeira's suicide is precipitated by feelings of guilt of having killed Heracles first and foremost. Additionally and on another level, her suicide is also invested with a figurative poisoning. This strings together Heracles and Deianeira not just in the simple act of dying, but in the particular death by poison. It swings Heracles' physical combustion and Deianeira's suicide into a symbolic sphere, where their deaths continue to be semantically overloaded with a fantastical and perhaps once again monstrous perspective. Both have manifestly left the realm of normal social existences.

2. The tragic affliction of snake bites

As Hyllus reports it, Heracles broke into a sweat as he found himself inextricably enveloped in the shirt that caused his skin to boil. It stuck to him as if it had been "glued on by a technician", biting him like a poison of a snake. We start to imagine this disease, which lives inside Heracles, like an animal.

> ἱδρὼς ἀνῄει χρωτί, καὶ προσπτύσσεται
> πλευραῖσιν ἀρτίκολλος, ὥστε τέκτονος,
> χιτὼν ἅπαν κατ᾽ ἄρθρον: ἦλθε δ᾽ ὀστέων
> ὀδαγμὸς ἀντίσπαστος: εἶτα φοινίος
> ἐχθρᾶς ἐχίδνης ἰὸς ὡς ἐδαίνυτο.[253]
>
> Sweat comes up from his skin, and the shirt clings fast
> to his sides, glued on as if by a technician
> all along his joints. An irritation went all the way to his bones,
> from the opposite end. Like of a blood-thirsty
> and hateful viper, that venom was eating him.

The venom will be his final struggle. Enshrouded by a φονίᾳ νεφέλᾳ ('cloud of murder', 831) Heracles' fate is sealed. The disease is ξυνοικοῦν ('co-habiting', 1055), βέβρωκε σάρκας (gnawed the flesh, 1054) and τ᾽ ἀρτηρίας / ῥοφεῖ 'sucks out the veins', 1055-6). The man carrying Heracles' stretcher tells Hyllus not to disturb the patient's sleep, so as not to awaken his horrible raging illness (980-3). It is clear by then that Heracles and the disease are one. It sleeps when he sleeps, and wakes up with him. Gradually, the disease supplants Heracles' identity. As Heracles calls it an ἀγρία νόσος (1033), he same as Philoctetes'. With this attribution of a wild nature of the disease, which yet will soon be the sole identity of its sufferer, it is understood that both the moral

253 Soph. *Trach.* 767-71 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 271)

opprobrium of being a ‘wild man’ as well as a ‘sick man’ will now converge in the character of Heracles, and perhaps bring out attributes which had always been suspected.[254] The *becomes* Heracles, and Heracles becomes the disease.

For brevity, two quotes will illustrate how concepts of disease can waver and command an ambiguity between medical meanings and symbolic ones. The first quote is from Ruth Padel, on Thucydides' description of the plague:

> “the *nosema*, sickness, is an alien intruder. It came from Ethiopia beyond Egypt, spreading through foreign lands (…) from outside to cause inner destruction, both in individual bodies and in relationships of the body politic. The image of *stasis* resonating against it adds a political dimension to the moral, physiological, and social disintegration possible in a Greek “body". This two-way traffic in medical and moral discourse directed European experience and European images of both plague and moral “pollution”. Shakespeare uses imagery of disease (especially venereal) in *Troilus and Cressida* to delineate a “sickening” society”.[255]

The second quote is from the historian of medicine, Mirko Grmek. It turns the notion around by suggesting that it is only modern readers who read the idea of punishment in the form of veneral disease into mythology:

> “[Prior to] the discovery of the real nature of contagion and when the etiology of venereal diseases was not yet securely established, the hoary antiquity of syphilis and other venereal diseases was “proven” indirectly by means that a modern reader would consider (...) stupefying. For example, Julius Rosenbaum (...) was convinced he had proved the existence of syphilis in Greco-Roman times by laying out irrefutable

254 Thumiger (2013) 30-32; Wender (1974); Mattison (2015).

255 Padel (1992), 53.

> documentation of certain erotic practices and morals that he considered to be corrupt".[256]

Heracles' love life as "sick" foreshadows the moral nature of the sickness that is to follow. Heracles really will die—albeit extremely indirectly—from his love life. Deianeira sends him the fatally anointed robe in a fit of erotic anxiety. Mitchell-Boyask speaks of a "reification of the disease" that jumps ship from being at first only a metaphor, and later an actual medical one. Mitchell-Boyask draws attention to how closely similar the literary representations of Heracles' disease in *Trachiniae* really is to Thucydides' account of the Plague (2.49);[257] and yet continue to operate on a symbolic plane all the time as well.

The love charm that Deianeira sent was of uncertain potency and surrounded by associations to the magical. Now, it is understood to work as if it was a snake bite. As Padel writes, "Snakes crystallize the double-edgedness of pharmaka.[258] Snake deaths appear in several tragedies in fact as a plot device,[259] and introduce a level of ambiguity always between literal meaning and symbolism. Not by chance is Philoctetes also the victim of a snake bite: in both of these plots, a terrible condition creeps over the person, and seals the person's de-humanization, or 'bestialization' in the eyes of the other people in the play. We may say, with Mitchell-Boyask: "Sophoclean heroes almost invariably have health problems that extend to the metaphorical".[260] As we might suppose, the descriptions of the fire rather imply that this disease is caused by chemicals in the clothing than by a snake.

256 Grmek (1989), 142-3.

257 Mitchell-Boyask (2008), 75.

258Padel (1992), 145.

259 Padel (1992), 123.

260 Mitchell-Boyask (2012), 316.

This only strengthens an impression of the disease as first and foremost symbolic. With it, it achieves the effect of setting up a moral distance between the diseased and the rest of society and clears the path for the society to know that Heracles is no longer a part of it at all.

VI. Deliberate misunderstandings

Now that we have considered some of the most nefarious potentialities of erotic rejection, we remain on the subject of Deianeira's agency, but look at her actions in a different light: it is as if she herself was already a half-erased woman. The disastrous negligence with which she employs Nessus' potion is a trait that other plots develop as well: known as the “Trugrede”, Ajax' parting speech is misunderstood by all present, and we will analyse if deliberate negligence should be considered as a reason for this tragic misunderstanding that turns out to be fatal. Similarly, in *Oedipus Tyrannus* Jocasta's various forms of cultivating ignorance about Oedipus' identity come into view. All these are examples where communications are kept deliberately superficial, and I will argue that this has an important function in preventing the problematic and the difficult from erupting into the open. These strategies are psychologically explainable, yet they of course promote the exclusion of unwelcome perspectives on a certain state of affairs. More than that, the act of deliberately ignoring certain facts and repressing them as much as possible is a way of abnegating responsibility or guilt for any of the horrible things—tragic events—that the plays are about.

1. Negligent: Deianeira

Deianeira's action need not be seen as revenge, as much as it is presented as simply a desperate measure taken in desperate times. That the outcome is the same is clear by the time Deianeira learns that her trick didn't work and has instead sent Heracles to his doom. Yet, Deianeira is cognizent that she has become the author of a catastrophe. She introduces her account of these goings-on to the Trachinian maidens at 669-70 with the comment: ὥστε μήποτ᾽ ἂν προθυμίαν ἄδηλον ἔργου τῳ παραινέσαι λαβεῖν : "so that I shall never henceforth advise unenlightened enthusiasm for action". The syntax here is dense, and interpretive translations could take us in two distinct directions; yet this sentence is deeply revelatory of Deianeira's thinking and character, and at a crucial moment of the story. In this construction with ὥστε μήποτ᾽ ἂν with infinitive, a literal translation would be: "so as never to recommend the taking of an unenlightened enthusiasm for an action". Commentators have sought to interpret that the deed is obscure, rather than the enthusiasm. Easterling, for instance, comments that "ἄδηλον goes in sense with ἔργου", arguing with Kamerbeek that it is most probably an instance of a "transferred epithet".[261] These two words ἄδηλον ἔργου sit next to one another in the sentence, and there is no reason why this word order arrangement should not be open to a cross-pollination of meaning, by attraction, as it were. In that case, one could say that simultaneously Deianeira's ἔργον is a dark one, as much as her προθυμία is an un-examined one. Michael Silk has argued for the need "to respond to Sophoclean words in their particular order", as these word order arrangements are often precisely the seat of

261 Easterling (1982), 157.

semantic diversion as a linguistic trope, particularly dear to Sophocles.[262]

There is an interpretive difference, which reaches into our interpretation of Deianeira's character more deeply. To stress that Deianeira is doing dark deeds in the secret recesses of her home, or to stress that Deianeira is prey to an ill-considered zeal for action, are two different ideas. It is also very nearly the only time that Deianeira expresses regret about the most regrettable action she does in the entire play. One may read her regret as that of a woman who had resorted to a love-philtre in order to regain her husband's love as a last resort. This woman is now grappling with the advisability of her own action, because it was carried out in secret, which carries an unspecified opprobrium. Yet it is equally possible to see a more intellectually endowed woman who, first and foremost, regrets the haste with which she took her decision. Edith Hall posits that unconsidered decision-making is the problem rather than doing something in secret. As Hall stresses, Deianeira was previously uncertain whether sending this robe to Heracles really was a good idea, but her deliberation upon the issue was unfortunately cut short by Lichas when he suddenly appeared, and, “fully aware that she has no certain knowledge of the effect of the substance with which she has smeared the robe”,[263] Deianeira chose to send it to Heracles anyway. This moment of negligence makes all the difference between Deianeira's guilt or innocence, according to Edwin Carawan's research also, because this unexamined enthusiasm, which she already regrets, disregards the will and dignity of another in

262 Silk (2011), 134.

263 Hall in Goldhill and Hall (2009), 71.

unpredictable ways.[264] For Carawan, already in Aristotle the criterion of guilt in law and popular reasoning was precisely the question of knowledge, not whether the accused had intended to commit the crime:[265] "in the Aristotelian *Magna Moralia* 1188b.32-39 we are told that a woman was once tried for the poisoning of her husband but pleaded that she had acted for love".[266] Moreover, archaeological evidence of ancient clothing reveals that many ancient dyes were caustic; an ancient Greek woman would surely have known that this was a danger.

Viewed like this, Deianeira appears strangely reckless in making such a flippant decision.

The lethal consequences of her ill-considered gift to Heracles would have to be her responsibility. The woven cloak as a traditional gift from wife to husband symbolizes the domestic virtues,[267] Penelope's loom is the most famous example of this. "Deianeira opens the play working at her loom, nearing completion of the great robe that she is weaving from devotion to her lord; and then, as the bitter truth emerges, she is driven to make desperate use of this labor of love",[268] Edwin Carawan writes. The monster kills Heracles, by the intermediary of this gift from Deianeira—who, though not-quite-knowing, is also not entirely unknowing of the garment's lethal powers. Deianeira's truncated contemplation on the issue of whether the cloak's magic dye may have any negative effects, appears in a more sinister light given the factors we have just thought about.

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264 Carawan (2000), 194.

265 Carawan (2000), 190.

266 Carawan (2000), 212.

267Lee (2004), 266.

268 Carawan (2000), 202.

Deianeira's character, conveyed for the greatest part through self-characterization, is at first sight a sweet and gentle one, dissimilar from other heroines who come across as more radical.[269] All the same, her subdued disposition still holds in store its own seeds of disaster. Long before meeting Iole, Deianeira was already staging her own effacement from the scene. She can see herself replaced by a younger consort to her husband, and makes no secret of being in the autumn of her life (149-50, 305). Although she is still as much herself as ever, with age her person has been thrown into a social vacuum where she is still married, but no longer erotically interesting to her husband, and is only rarely visited by him. In her desperation, she sent the dyed robe to Heracles knowing that if it worked, they would live together happily ever after, and if it did not work, there was always suicide. Thus, she progressively cancels herself out of the family picture, silent in her last hour of human company.

Emphasis on the loss of youth shows us a Deianeira contemplating her own self as a life already half-erased. This builds her up to a dangerous agent, able of a roulette-like handling of dangerous chemicals. These themes and qualities of Deianeira's thinking will be further taken up by Hyllus in the final lessons of the drama. Hyllus there will decry the indifference of the gods. This force of indifference, which inhabits Deianeira also (Lichas had called her *agnomona* at 474), has a perceived cruelty in it.

269 Comparison between the three women: Lee (2004).

… μεγάλην δὲ θεῶν ἀγνωμοσύνην
εἰδότες ἔργων τῶν πρασσομένων,
οἳ φύσαντες καὶ κληζόμενοι
πατέρες τοιαῦτ᾽ ἐφορῶσι πάθη.[270]

… the great indifference of the gods,
to deeds being done
they who create us, and are called
fathers and who look over our suffering

Trachiniae ends with Hyllus' oft-discussed anger against the gods, because he finds them to have been careless, in a way criminally negligent. Without going into a philosophical discussion, in the grander scheme of *Trachiniae*, it is precisely this kind of ἀγνωμοσύνη that must have been in Deianeira, to act so casually with dangerous substances. The end of *Trachiniae* accuses of the gods of being too blasé about human disasters. This moral is easily applied back to Deianeira, who has achieved what she perhaps did not think she could: she has killed Heracles, without even applying much attention.[271]

270 (Soph. *Trach.* 1266-9).

271 I thank Eszter Galfalvi for first giving me the idea that Deianeira could be construed as a quintessential femme fatale in as she comes over as sweet and gentle, but is perniciously destructive.

2. Staged misunderstanding

Deianeira's negligent behaviour vis-a-vis someone whom she anyway considers monstrous is a plot pattern which we can find more times in Sophocles. One other possible instance is the reception of Ajax's farewell speech. Known as the *Trugrede*, this parting speech has left many wanting to find clues of Ajax' suicidal intent. It is possible to make a case that the receiving end of the speech has as much to do with the deception as the emitter of the speech. In other words the misunderstanding of this all-important speech stems not only from Ajax' ambiguous utterance, but also from the surrounding listeners who are ill-prepared to understand the clues, or perhaps even deliberately obtuse to them. In *Ajax*, the estrangement between protagonist and community is extreme at this stage. However, Tecmessa reported the following about Ajax's moonlighting activities:

> κεῖνος γὰρ ἄκρας νυκτός, ἡνίχ᾽ ἕσπεροι
> λαμπτῆρες οὐκέτ᾽ ἦθον, ἄμφηκες λαβὼν
> ἐμαίετ᾽ ἔγχος ἐξόδους ἕρπειν κενάς.
> κἀγὼ 'πιπλήσσω καὶ λέγω: τί χρῆμα δρᾷς,
> Αἴας;[272]
>
> But the man, in the middle of the night, after the evening's
> watch fires are out, taking hold of the double edged sword
> he was about to creep away for a pointless outing.
> And I tap him and say "what on earth are you doing,
> Ajax (…)

It surely dawns on Tecmessa that something awful is about to happen. This frenzied nocturnal rising from the bed, arming

272 Soph. Aj. 284-89 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 13).

oneself with the big sword and making ready to leave the house gives Tecmessa to understand that all is not well : καὶ δῆλός ἐστιν ὥς τι δρασείων κακόν (326). On the backdrop of Ajax's prior exploits of torturing and killing all the animals, the scene is set for more violence to happen. Ajax rushes out, leaving Tecmessa to work out for herself what he might be up to. Later, Tecmessa will report an almost identical scenario. Just before his suicide, a very similar scene takes place in their tent, and once again Ajax refuses to let Tecmessa in on his plans.

> ὦ δέσποτ᾽ Αἴας, τί ποτε δρασείεις φρενί;
> *Aj.* μὴ κρῖνε, μὴ 'ξέταζε: σωφρονεῖν καλόν.[273]
>
> Oh sir Ajax, what ever are you planning, in your mind?
> Ajax : Don't judge me, don't interrogate me, being acceptant is true beauty.

So similar is this situation to how Tecmessa reported the first time that Ajax went missing, it surprises that Tecmessa fails to see a pattern emerge. She may not suspect suicide, but having witnessed the outcome of the first nocturnal outing, she may at least guess that something quite horrific may be on the cards. Ajax has become estranged from the community. Tecmessa's descriptions of Ajax' actions inside the house play a cardinal role in crafting the image of Ajax as someone all at once demonic, bestial, savage, barbaric and possessed, a mere parody of the man she married and in fact no honourable man at all. Commentators have noted the same impression that Tecmessa is primarily focused on how Ajax' actions will reflect badly on herself. As Finglass writes: "disgrace, rather than grief, is what she fears (cf. 473)".[274]

273 Soph. Aj. 585-6 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 25).

274 Finglass (2011), 284.

Elements of unfavorable characterisation were slipping into the play from the beginning, with Athena exposing a vulnerable, but horrifying Ajax in the middle of a psychotic episode, and soon after this Tecmessa at 212 calls him *thourios* ("like a wild animal", and “roaring like a bull”). In *Ajax*, Tecmessa and the others all can hear Ajax announcing his suicide in a farewell speech, but prefer to give it the benefit of doubt and decide to understand that he is going to perform some cleansing rites in the marshlands. Having inadvertently performed a horror show that no-one can quite understand, Ajax also seems to be speaking in riddles. When he discreetly announces his suicide, those around him are ill prepared to understand what he means; but it is also unclear how they would have reacted if they had understood him better. A general failure to understand his drift generates the tragic delay in finding him, which appears retrospectively most convenient for the community. When they find his body, Tecmessa exclaims that there lies “our” Ajax:

> Αἴας ὅδ᾽ ἡμῖν ἀρτίως νεοσφαγὴς
> κεῖται[275]
>
> Our Ajax, just recently slain,
> Lies here.

This sudden return to love and loyalty does not sit well with the previous lack of concern. To complicate matters, the construction of his mental derangement is subjective rather than objective. His loss of reason is rhetorically exaggerated in order to engineer a public perception. It is possible to fabricate artificially the impression of unreasonableness with the help of argumentative constructs, such as the omission of counter-arguments. Logic

275 Soph.Aj.898-99 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 37).

behind Ajax's actions and thoughts becomes apparent to the reader, and so too would it have been to the audience. Sophocles disposed the rest of the cast so that they would deliberately miss hints, or put obstacles in the way of communication. In doing this, the play *Ajax* is not merely a presentation of Ajax and his unhappy exploits, but also a portrayal of the community and its reactions. Other tragic protagonists similarly provide a veritable course of self-defining speeches. It is not possible for the outside viewer remain convinced that Ajax, or other protagonists in similar positions, are impossible to understand.[276] This should undermine an unambiguous recognition of Ajax's hubris, and distribute the idea of hubris more evenly across the entire set of characters.

It is the same story in *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus seems happy enough with the information that Philoctetes has been left to agonize between a rock and a hard place for ten years, and approaches Philoctetes as if nothing was the matter. With Philoctetes, the most conspicuous alienating factor separating him from society is illness, accompanied by disruptive behaviours. His solitary and undignified way of life creates an additional social hurdle between Odysseus and Neoptolemus on a visit from the army, and this ex-soldier now animal, Philoctetes. The portrayal of his ragged and decrepit state is exaggerated and emphasized as a reason for his exclusion, which works even better in retrospect and as a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy. Seeing as the speeches of protagonists are often long and articulate, the failure of communication between the characters of a tragedy and the ensuing advent of death and destruction comes into a sinister

276 Heath (2005), 176.

light. Oedipus who is still alive when he is found, shouts in an accusatory tone at:

> τὸν αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ πατέρα τόνδ᾽ ἀπήλασας
> κἄθηκας ἄπολιν καὶ στολὰς ταύτας φορεῖν,
> ἃς νῦν δακρύεις εἰσορῶν[277]
>
> you drove me, your own father, into exile;
> you instituted me as a citiless one and caused me to wear this clothing
> that now you bemoan, as you see

The reluctant, complex and often all but successful process of reintroducing the tragic protagonist into some sort of sense of belonging to the community, be he still alive or already dead, is fraught with the difficult discourse of who is to blame for the tragic events that have occurred beforehand and that have conspired to bring on his estrangement in the first place.

A common theme is the feverish quest to inscribe the blame for what happened firmly within the character of the person experiencing the tragedy. There is no escape, it seems, from the majority opinion that seeks to vilify a man. The environment of the tragic protagonist makes a strong—and especially, a majority—argument for appreciating the grave nature of crime, or change, and deep estrangement, and unacceptability of the protagonist. A failure of communication based on deliberate refusal of communication, for instance by denial of a common language, unfolds again and again. Presumably because they are touching upon thorny areas, and because they represent problems that are off-limit, their ideas tap into deep-seated collective phobias.

277 Soph.OC.1356 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 413).

On the backdrop of how he has been introduced, Philoctetes has trouble at first to start a good conversation with Neoptolemus. He wins him over gradually and with effort. Philoctetes begins by stressing that he is not at all a monster and in fact is well acquainted with the mainstay of Hellenic culture, keen to take his place within its framework:

> ἰὼ ξένοι,
> τίνες ποτ᾽ ἐς γῆν τήνδε ναυτίλῳ πλάτῃ
> κατέσχετ᾽ οὔτ᾽ εὔορμον οὔτ᾽ οἰκουμένην;
> ποίας πάτρας ὑμᾶς ἂν ἢ γένους ποτὲ
> τύχοιμ᾽ ἂν εἰπών; σχῆμα μὲν γὰρ Ἑλλάδος
> στολῆς ὑπάρχει προσφιλεστάτης ἐμοί:[278]
>
> Ah, strangers!
> Who, and from which land, did you come by naval journey
> all the way here, where it is not easy to dock, nor is the place inhabited?
> What kind of home and people
> might I guess? It looks like from Hellas
> you wear the clothes – of my own sweet home

Unlike Neoptolemus who is terrified and anxious about his encounter, Philoctetes is delighted to see that he is receiving a visit. His greeting address makes no secret of his nostalgia for company and the finer pleasures of social culture. Despite its friendly tone, Philoctetes' greeting speech is met with utter silence. As Philoctetes continues his welcome speech, he repeatedly exhorts Neoptolemus to say something, but this reply is slow to come around. Philoctetes stops and starts over and over with questions intended to solicit a response, but fail to do so : "Hello, strangers" – "Who are you?" – "Where are you from?" - "are you by any chance Greek?" – "please say something" – "please excuse my looks" – "please speak" – "please answer".

278 Soph.Phil.219-24 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 304).

Nooter calls this “a veritable theory of human ethics based in the obligation simply to *reply* to one another”.[279] Philoctetes' greeting address enacts the silence of the other side, and is at last followed by a statement of self-awareness and the realization of his own looks.[280]

279 Nooter (2012), 127.

280 Montiglio (2000), 224-5.

3. Jocasta's psyche

One could be forgiven for thinking that inhabitants of the tragic world deliberately turn a blind eye, or a deaf ear, to avoid involvement with any bad situation, even when this bad situation is unfolding under their very eyes. The wish to steer clear of responsibility is too great. Other characters refuse to hear the complaints of an accusing victim, and always ask for the volume to be lowered. It is mostly ambiguous whether the characters deliberately turn a blind eye or are genuinely unaware of what happens. There are astonishing lags of cognition, calling to question if indeed the protestations of ignorance are sincere. In *Oedipus Tyrannus*, for example, we may find the chorus deliberately obstructing Jocasta's understanding of the situation by refusing to report to her what has just been said between Tiresias and Oedipus, and yet, it would be very important for Jocasta to know this:

> δόκησις ἀγνὼς λόγων [281]
> There was undiscerning acceptance of accounts

Jocasta then becomes strongly opposed to Oedipus going on any further in finding out who he is.[282] Even when Oedipus refers to the authority of Tiresias as an important source to help him clarify the circumstances of his own origins, Jocasta is against it.[283] We must wonder if Jocasta is as ignorant of the situation as this

281 Soph.OT.681 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 147).

282 Soph.OT.685-6 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 147).

283 Soph.OT.708 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 148).

portrayal suggests, or if she does not command a greater duplicity —psychologically, latent and unintentional, or deliberately concealed within her. McCoy argues that Jocasta is simply less possessed by curiosity, and has a greater acceptance of "chance as central to human existence",[284] which has for corollary that many things are simply inscrutable, and therefore need not be researched from the outset, on top of there always being a risk of discovering something one would rather not have known. Jocasta comes up with all manner of reasons why Oedipus should leave alone the inquest into his own family roots, almost as if she wanted to delay the discovery of who he really is—because she knows it? It is simply not certain.

Taking into consideration other plays, Jocasta's attitude is by no means unique, in fact it blends in perfectly with the environment of any problematic protagonist who is beginning to discuss issues which do not sit well with the peacefulness of the community. The tendency to tone down a protagonist's urgent demands is a plot device or theme that runs through numerous plays, and it is surely a device of social exclusion if we take that to mean the insistance that the past happened a certain way, and no alternative versions of the past will be tolerated nor any inquests into it.

Jocasta herself is not immune from admonitions to calm down her inquisitive mind. When it is her turn to become overly agitated to find out what is happening, the chorus tells Jocasta it was nothing, just angry ramblings.[285] Ignorance is passed around by majorities. This instance in Oedipus gives off the impression that the sole purpose of groups in tragedy is to force the individuals to dim their inquisitions.

284 Berzins-McCoy (2013), 46.

285 Soph.OT 523-4 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 141).

All along, Oedipus has restricted mobility because of his feet, which were mutilated by Laius and Jocasta at his birth.[286] Yet no-one acknowledges this, in fact no-one seems even to see it, until suddenly, the punctured feet precisely become the mark by which Oedipus is recognized. Bollack has mused that perhaps Jocasta felt shame and regret that motivated her deliberately to omit mention of this circumstance. Perhaps it is a way to make up for the active role she had in abandoning Oedipus as a baby. Perhaps, Jocasta's incestuous liaison with her yet unrecognized and disabled son stems, somewhere, from an ancient reminiscence of having once caused such damage to her own child. Parhaps Jocasta harbours complex feelings of misplaced guilt towards him whom she recognizes only subconsciously, because of the mutilation and abandonment she subjected him to as an infant.[287] Jocasta certainly has her reasons not to remember Oedipus, and it is difficult to decide whether she deliberately pretends not to be interested in Oedipus' birth and origins because she fears he might be the son of peasants, or whether she knows exactly who he is. Even knowing the whole truth, the characters look for more recent reasons to reject Oedipus from their community than the old story of an oracle from many decades ago.

Consequently, the illness that has infected all Thebes appears like the extended radiation effect of the moral illness that rips at the heart of the royal family: the incestuous liaison between Oedipus and Jocasta. Since the incestuous liaison was not intentional, and in this sense was not practised in a consensual manner, the moral illness under scrutiny here is purely the retrospective shame. Oedipus and Jocasta's incest (or retrospective shame thereof) is

286 On Oedipus' mobility see Kicey (2014), 29-55.

287 Bollack (1995), 153.

conceptualized as if it radiates a contamination across all of Thebes, which 'we' may visualise like a moral Chernobyl. In this panorama, the moral actions of the plot's main characters find a kind of echo-chamber in their environing community, which responds with ill health, creating an amplification of the troubles in the play.

In *Antigone* an abridged version of this plague scenario is proffered as a warning by Tiresias, ardent to impress upon Creon the great need to bury Polyneices. Until then, the corpse continues to work its evil magic by continuing to radiate contamination into Thebes. Individuals will have to immerse themselves into an issue relating to a shameful act, which they have not yet discovered of themselves. Creon has not yet understood that he is doing something inappropriate by leaving Polyneices out to decompose, but over the course of *Antigone* he will, to his cost, understand as much. When, much later, Creon will realize the error of his ways, he will summarize his own situation:

> (…) ἐν δ᾽ ἔσεισεν ἀγρίαις ὁδοῖς,[288]
>
> (…) I walked on savage paths.

With the confession of having gone some ἀγρίαις ὁδοῖς ("savage paths"), Creon puts himself in the category of the wild and uncivilized, which has such a negative tint throughout Sophoclean drama.

Polyneices is dead already when *Antigone* begins. That the debate circles around a person who is already dead indicates how much the idea of the person is under fire, above and beyond the physical self and its agency. And yet, the presence of this corpse is

288 Soph.Ant.1271-74 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 234).

central to the play's discussions and its events. Jonathan Strauss speaks of a "sentient corpse",[289] in his 2013 appraisal of late modern European and specifically post-Hegelian interpretations of *Antigone*. For Susannetti, a Platonic idea of the immortal soul informs the tragic character's understanding of someone's identity.[290] He adduces this passage from *Republic V* (469d): δὲ οὐ δοκεῖ (...) γυναικείας τε καὶ σμικρᾶς διανοίας τὸ πολέμιον νομίζειν τὸ σῶμα τοῦ τεθνεῶτος ("Does it not seem to you lowly and mentally effeminate to reckon against the dead body of an enemy"?).[291] This reflection is contradicted by all the actions taken against Polyneices in *Antigone*. Here, the body of the enemy is still always the enemy.[292] The metaphysical status of Polyneices' corpse cannot be entirely determined. What is certain is that Polyneices' corpse is laden with political and social meaning to all the characters who speak in *Antigone*, even if the logic of this meaning or these meanings is vague and open to a plurality of conceptualizations. Strauss argues that "the slain have not yet dissolved into unconsciousness; they still, it would seem, retain some glimmer of awareness, and their unsleeping cause becomes that of the outraged cities that circle Thebes".[293] Even as a dead man, Polyneices continues to have the power to cause havoc in Thebes. The putrefaction of his corpse just outside the city gates, Tiresias angrily tells an obstinate Creon, is radiating an airborne contamination which causes all sorts of malfunctions in the city. Particles of Polyneices' rotting flesh have been carried into the

289 Strauss (2013), 57.

290 Susannetti (2012), 46.

291 Slings (2003), 204.

292 Susannetti (2012), 46.

293 Strauss (2013), 59.

city by winds blowing contaminated dust into it, or ferried in by birds who have been in contact with the corpse. In this way, the unburied remains of Polyneices continue to spread ill health, folly and doom amongst the living. Tiresias reports on the disturbed behaviour he has noticed in the birds:

> ἀγνῶτ᾽ ἀκούω φθόγγον ὀρνίθων, κακῷ
> κλάζοντας οἴστρῳ καὶ βεβαρβαρωμένῳ.
> καὶ σπῶντας ἐν χηλαῖσιν ἀλλήλους φοναῖς
> ἔγνων: πτερῶν γὰρ ῥοῖβδος οὐκ ἄσημος ἦν.[294]
>
> Unable to recognize, I hear the cry of birds, awfully
> squealing, gadfly-like, and in manner most outlandish.
> I realized they were drawing at one another with bloodthirsty feet,
> Nor did the rushing of their wings fail to convey a meaning.

As a plea to Creon to consider burying Polyneices, Tiresias confronts him with a harrowing portrait of the city in a state of contamination. Here, birds turn into harpies, sacrificial flames do not kindle, meats turn prematurely foul, nothing is as it should be. One can set this in parallel with a portrayal of Thebes under the gloomy spell of Polyneices' disinterment, with the plague scenarios evoked in the early parts of *Oedipus Tyrannus,* a pestilence that contaminates Thebes and turns it barren.[295] There is mention of γῆς ὦδ᾽ ἀκάρπως κἀθέως ἐφθαρμένης[296] (fruitless, godforsaken, ruined earth). The destruction is even more fearfully illustrated by the image of stillbirths and/or women dying in childbirth:

294 Soph.Ant. 1001-4 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 223).

295 Susannetti (2012), 349.

296 Soph.*OT* 253 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 131).

οὔτε γὰρ ἔκγονα
κλυτᾶς χθονὸς αὔξεται οὔτε τόκοισιν
ἰηίων καμάτων ἀνέχουσι γυναῖκες[297]

Neither does the produce
of the holy earth grow taller, nor do the women
bear the labours of childbirth

It has to be said, the meaning of τόκοισιν is uncertain. It can mean "parturition", "childbirth", or "offspring", and could relate to the mothers, or the children. It is not certain whether these lines allude to the death of childbearing women in the throes of plague symptoms, miscarriages or abortions caused by the disease.[298] The infection is total. This imagery of a pestilent contamination that lays low all of Thebes, spans across to *Oedipus Tyrannus.* That play spins out the plague scenario to a further extreme: the complete cessation of new births in the city and the death of many, in short, a massive cull of the entire population. The import of this to *Antigone* is, foremost, an understanding of how urgently relevant it will be for everybody in Thebes—not just for Antigone or Creon individually—to resolve the issue of Polyneices' burial for fear of such a plague scenario repeating itself. What is more, the disease issue has a symbolic dimension. The references to the plague in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, by the end of the play, translate into references to incest. When Oedipus announces that he absolutely must get to the bottom of his birth and origins, Jocasta wants to stop this with the argument that she is already sick enough as it is.

297 Soph.*OT* 172-5 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 127).

298 Stella (2010), 195.

μὴ πρὸς θεῶν, εἴπερ τι τοῦ σαυτοῦ βίου
κήδῃ, ματεύσῃς τοῦθ᾽: ἄλις νοσοῦσ᾽ ἐγώ.[299]

Jocasta: By the gods, do not, if you care for your life,
seek out this information: I myself am already sick enough.

Jocasta says this as she has just understood that Oedipus is her son, and only a few more words will be exchanged between the doomed spouses before she rushes to her suicide. The disease she speaks of at this moment is symbolic, it is the shame of incest, rather than an infection of the black death epidemic.[300] In this light, the reference to disease has multiple meanings and Jocasta's words are sustained by the weight of a sick city.

We have seen instances of characters shirking away from answering to the inquisitions of an outsider, knowing that a horrific realization awaits (Jocasta(?)), or fearing any outcome and therefore keeping a guarded silence (Neoptolemus). We have seen failures of verbal communication so grave that one wonders if individuals have been deliberately obtuse (Tecmessa), and decisions being taken in haste although their consequences are heavy and one could therefore speak of criminal negligence (Deianeira). All these unwanted and unintentional failures and tragic consequences are byproducts of omissions and mental absences, rather than the result of conscious decisions and clearly pronounced arguments. In this, we understand the great danger inherent in overly superficial, ill-considered, or hasty advice, or of the “silent-treatment” that awaits several of tragedy's outcast protagonist. The deliberate reduction, withdrawal or unprevented

299 Soph.OT 1058-61 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 151).

300 Stella (2010), 275.

failure of communication has its dangers for the protagonist. For, when disaster strikes eventually, in these cases there is no culprit responsible, no-one will have to take the blame, for it will be a case of no-one knowing and no-one intending for such terrible things to happen. For this reason we will now discuss the avoidance of blame by the community.

4. Avoiding blame for tragic events

Choruses may promote the opinion that the blame for tragic events must necessarily lie in the protagonist, since he/she is the one experiencing a disaster. Susannetti writes on the chorus of Theban elders in *Antigone*. For example the chorus of elders in *Antigone* eyes her perspective with suspicion and malevolence. As Susannetti has written, the chorus are not amenable to a perspective that differs from what *they* have always known and want to continue holding true.[301] This is more than just a tendency, for the motivations behind it are fundamentally sinister. It is not a case of a group of intellectually lazy elders who lack the flexibility to change their perspective on something. Latent in the refusal to approve Antigone's voice is the partition between an official version of past events, and a concurrent, contesting one. It is practically a definition of exclusion, when the majority of people insist on a version of the past that only one person disagrees with. A fast-track way to invalidate Antigone's unwelcome vocalizations is surely to criticize Antigone's ability to think clearly, as Creon easily does through the shorthand of gender-based prejudice and the idea that women do not think clearly. The chorus adds the suggestion that Antigone is irrational. In this way, the argument about the version of the past morphs into a personal attack on Antigone with a view to stamp out her opinion. It is not just in *Antigone* where an intellectual environment, sustained by choruses but also voiced by the other characters, seeks to dim and tone down the daring stance of the

301 Susannetti (2012), 45.

protagonist. This also doubles up as an extrinsic characterization of this protagonist.

In all, it is the prevalent opinion between the bystanders within a play of a tragedy, and even among scholars of tragedy, that the many misfortunes that befall the tragic hero of any Greek play are brought to pass by their own fault. Even in *Philoctetes*, the chorus informs Philoctetes that he only has himself to blame (1095ff.) :

> σύ τοι σύ τοι κατηξίωσας, ὦ βαρύποτμε,
> κοὐκ
> ἄλλοθεν τύχᾳ ἄδ' ἀπὸ μείζονος,
> εὖτέ γε παρὸν φρονῆσαι
> τοῦ λώιονος δαίμονος εἵλου τὸ κάκιον αἰνεῖν.[302]
>
> And you, you have done yourself so much wrong,
> oh miserable one, not
> from elsewhere stems the misfortune by which you lose the better option
> you could have chosen wisely
> but decided to follow the worse daemons, bringing on these ills.

In *Antigone*, we find the idea of the "self to blame" proposed by the chorus to Creon:

> σὲ δ᾽ αὐτόγνωτος ὤλεσ᾽ ὀργά.[303]
>
> Your self-willed disposition is what has destroyed you.

Creon still has the opportunity to extricate himself from disaster,[304] meaning that it will ultimately be his fault if things go wrong. A similar point comes to Creon, warning him that he is the sole cause of disease in the entire city:

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302 Soph.Phil.1094-1100 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 339).

303 Soph.Ant.875 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 218).

304 Griffith (1999), 273.

καὶ ταῦτα τῆς σῆς ἐκ φρενὸς νοσεῖ πόλις.[305]
And it is your own mind that is the source of the sickness now afflicting the city.

It is less often acknowledged that the recurrent encouragements to stop mourning, and that casting a severely upset character as unreasonable and out of line, also has a strongly authoritarian flavour. Yet, taking these considerations into account, we may reconsider how casting someone as insane, showing them as out of line, as lacking in wisdom and self-control is itself the work of a cunning argument, which we might critically inspect. Here, one begins to recognize an argumentative structure of authority that deliberately builds the impression that their own side is only sensible and rational, but that the tragic protagonist by contrast is irrational, or even insane. As members situated outside of this argument, "we" can or should not necessarily agree with that assessment, which after all stems from inside the play and not from an objective source.

For instance in *Electra,* Clytaemnestra says that she can not understand Electra when she is lamenting her father. It is only when Electra collects herself and speaks in a way that is pleasing to Clytaemnestra, that Clytaemnestra can say:

καὶ μὴν ἐφίημ᾽: εἰ δέ μ᾽ ὧδ᾽ ἀεὶ λόγους
ἐξῆρχες, οὐκ ἂν ἦσθα λυπηρὰ κλύειν[306]

if you always addressed me in such a tone,
you would not be difficult to listen to.

Perhaps their discourse conveys inklings of very awful wrongs indeed, which society prefers to mute at their inception. Rather

305 Soph.Ant.1015 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 244).

306 Soph.El. 556-7 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 82).

than to give full run to emotions and ideas which are held in by the aggrieved and problematic protagonists and their families or companions, in Sophocles we are repeatedly shown instances where the most complex ideas about awful events are forcefully concealed by numerous figures. Sophocles portrays the community and its various members as an item that the audience should equally judge, and over which the audience is equally superior in knowledge. These opinions of the remaining characters and chorus put forward to this suffering protagonist all somehow corroborate each other in their conviction that the fault lies with the protagonist. This then lets the morals of this community also recede into a less prominent position. Tragedy is infested by tragic events and dynamics for which no-one wants to take the blame. Instead, blame is gradually concentrated upon the unfortunate protagonists themselves. This allows the rest of the community to continue to feel justified in its ways. The departure from social norm that attracts blame and not praise, seems to be multifarious in its variants, and infinite like the area outside the bounds of a Venn diagram. In each case, individuals transform themselves. From their transformation ensues a change in social appraisal, often an exclusion, and blame for tragic events is largely placed on the protagonist. The tragic protagonist does things that society cannot well deal with. He or she shows to the rest of society what sort of situation would rapidly turn into a disaster, what kind of extremity is too far.

Choruses point the finger at a protagonist's states of mental agitation, extreme anger, outrage, sorrow or stubbornness exhibited by protagonists who struggle against their personal odds. Choruses together with other characters may close in on the protagonist, to put them at fault for indulging in excessive

emotions against please to come back to reason. But what is reason, and who decides what is reasonable? This question should be present in our minds every time we read an argument in tragedy. Knox had written that the tragic hero was "an impossible individual"[307] who has gone beyond the pale, who has transgressed norms of social acceptability in a wholly reprehensible manner. Knox's readings are certainly compassionate, yet they dwell upon the long prevailing view that it is the person experiencing the problems who must be at fault, rather than everybody else. We may broadly refer to this as a "self to blame" reading of tragedy. In modern times, the media and politics have predominantly employed this "self to blame" reading of tragedies like we see them unfold in today's urban and peri-urban environments. Modern tragedies of incest, domestic violence or rape are never completely clear of the suspicion that the victim is not really a victim, that they only had themselves to blame. As for discussions of tragedies involving lives touched by alcoholism, homelessness, AIDS, obesity, or many of the diseases that were once called the diseases of civilization, the reading of these life stories in the vein of "they only have themselves to blame" is not uncontested, but still always vociferous. Problems like these, in their ancient equivalent, eat away at the protagonists from Sophocles. The shame of being caught up in bad circumstances and fear of failure in society both loom large over the characterial make-up of Sophoclean protagonists. One thinks of Ajax and his desperation and shame, Oedipus and his self-punishment. Knox's reading emphasizes that the tragic hero may have sympathetic traits, but is out of order in a major way. This leads to an understanding of Greek tragedy as a cautionary tale on

307 Knox (1964), 130.

the dangers of being all too different from the rest, positing the act of being different as a choice, and a morbid and socially malignant choice at that. In this reading, Greek tragedy acts as the textual portrayal of an individual who has somehow arrived at the outer limits of social conventions, overstepped them, and catapulted themselves into a state of social exclusion. Rather than exposing his own character flaws, the tragic protagonist through his crisis inadvertently exposes exactly where the limits are, and where the fabric of society is cracking at its seams.

VII. Submerged scenarios

We have looked at some examples of how the main character's perspectives or uncomfortable truths are deliberately pushed out of sight by the protagonist's environment. This section delves into how the contesting protagonists see themselves, how they establish their own evaluations of the events at hand. Their views may be submerged at last, but they are still visible with varying degrees of clarity and brightness: Philoctetes' or Ajax' long monologues are rich mines of information on how they, themselves, see themselves as noble and in no wise wild or uncivilized. Their perspective, like their mode of existence, is segregated: Philoctetes is segregated by his position on an island, and Ajax by his creation of a private world teetering between hallucination and real. Both hold the dead Achilles in high admiration, whose characater traits re-appear from the submerged past. Memory and commemoration of a submerged world seems also to motivate Antigone and Electra. Both women fall into conflict with their surroundings for mourning their dead, whom the leadership has decided to exclude from privilege and commemoration.

1. Noble on their own terms

In the following we will discuss some of the alternative versions of the past that the excluded protagonists weave in their private time and segregated existence. We will also discuss their private values of identity that allow them to stick to their own version of both the past and the present, continuing to be the same person even though they have been ordered to change if they wish to belong. Theirs are alternative, in some cases antiquated and no longer relevant concepts of how to live, of what is right and honourable and what is not, even when the majority has swayed to new ways of life. In their estrangement and their passion, they run the risk of departing into a solipsistic heterocosm no-one else can understand or accept. These strands of opinion on a certain matter, or of perception of how something went, are progressively blotted out by the more numerous voices of other characters besides the tragic protagonist. For this reason, we might refer to them as "submerged" scenarios.

One of the paradoxes connected with the Sophoclean protagonists is that they are affected by dramatic changes which their environment decries, yet to this they counterpoise an articulate voice (often spread out over several long speeches) establishing their identity as a distinctive, unchanged and unchanging one. Philoctetes and Ajax are particularly involved with a discussion of the male heroic identity. Electra and Antigone second this, and for their own part are in addition tied to a concept of female traditional lamentation and the furthering of traditional aristocratic practices and thought. Philoctetes, Oedipus, Polyneices and Ajax

are also connected to the discourse of noble birth and the identity of the aristocratic virtuous male. What all share is the experience of transition from social high regard to exclusion by the society. The most illustrative case is perhaps Philoctetes who, socially, is purely perceived through the lens of his disease, demoted to the bottom of civilization from an original status as an eminently respectable, important leader of the Achaean host at Troy. Eventually, he is considered a toxic and contagious element, worthy only of rejection and exclusion, and not in need of human courtesy.

Considering Philoctetes' long and bitter course of struggles for bare survival, it may not be far fetched to suppose, as Odysseus does, that Philoctetes has now become a bit strange, somewhat ragged in appearance, and perhaps has even suffered some form of mental identity loss, or loss of self. But the audience is soon disabused of this supposition, for no sooner has Neoptolemus arrived on Philoctetes' doorstep that Philoctetes begins the process of re-instating his self and his identity. Though this place may be Lemnos, far from his palatial home and its refinements, removed from the honour and glory of a scintillating career in the army, Philoctetes soon succeeds in evoking his erstwhile grandeur through the artifice of speech. He cites the strengths that his elite education afforded him as the very weapons he needed, and made use of, in order to endure the ten-year ordeal of life on the fringes of society, afflicted by a painful disease. Where others would have crumbled under the weight of the ordeal, he succeeded to preserve himself:

ἀφ᾽ ὧν διέζων ὥς τ᾽ ἔφυν εὐκάρδιος.
οἶμαι γὰρ οὐδ᾽ ἂν ὄμμασιν μόνον θέαν
ἄλλον λαβόντα πλὴν ἐμοῦ τλῆναι τάδε:[308]

The hardships I endured... as strong-hearted as I was born.
I think that no-one but me seeing this sight with their eyes
would have endured it. But I did.

Such an idea also underlies Oedipus' self-regard as he goes about explaining his own identity in *Oedipus Coloneus*, where he is wandering in exile, old, decrepit, blind, and with his usual limp, begging in rags. Yet he holds on to his humanity, through upholding his nobility:

στέργειν γὰρ αἱ πάθαι με χὠ χρόνος ξυνὼν
μακρὸς διδάσκει καὶ τὸ γενναῖον τρίτον.[309]

Time and my hardships have taught me to be patient,
and thirdly also my nobility.

Oedipus' words recall the self-identification of the Homeric Odysseus, at times battered, bruised and despoiled of his dignitary clothing and stately appearance, and yet, always able to bring out the momentum of his own identity through the power of speech. The entire genre of tragedy, one could say, is in a "condition verbale",[310] in other words, everything is made of words and exists through speeches that bring it to our attention. For example, Oedipus and Philoctetes manage to resurrect themselves from their own ashes, so to speak, by the power of presenting and re-presenting themselves through speech.

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308 Soph.Phil.535-38 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 316).

309 Soph.OC.8-9 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 357).

310 Thomas Poiss used the phrase

According to the Aristotelian definition (*Rhet*. 1390b), the *gennaios anêr* is the man whose nature does not degrade or degenerate in the face of trying circumstances. Such a character is always true to his own self, no matter what horrible situations he might fall into. He does not become dishonourable or take uncharacteristic measures, no matter what happens.[311] The noble person should exhibit these high moral standards naturally, but the personality is also consolidated by an aristocratic education and training. In this conceptualization, nature and nurture are hard to tell apart. It is at least clear that the *gennaios anēr* is expected to be able to bear suffering without experiencing a change in their nature. Thus it is that Oedipus is told that he surely must be a noble man, even though his situation does not reflect this:

> οἶσθ᾽, ὦ ξέν᾽, ὡς νῦν μὴ σφαλῇς; ἐπείπερ εἰ
> γενναῖος, ὡς ἰδόντι, πλὴν τοῦ δαίμονος,[312]
>
> Take care now, stranger, that you come to no harm;
> for you are noble, if I may judge by your looks, leaving
> your ill-fortune aside.

The *gennaioi andres* are expected to stand above their own circumstances. Ajax's captive wife, Tecmessa, knowingly uses this supposition as a point of reference. Boundaries between innate character and social conditioning are soft and blurry, as both paramteters feed into one another. This only underscores the paradox in the exclusion of a protagonist who belongs to such a crop of *gennaioi andres,* the paradox of such a person being denied the social appreciation reserved especially for them and their likes. Presumably, this paradox is what allows the spectators to understand the tragic aspect of the social exclusion, and invests

311 Guidorizzi (2008), 204.

312 Soph.OT. 75-6 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 360).

the protagonist's assertions of identity, and their antagonists' denial of this identity, with dramatic dynamism. Philoctetes, Ajax, Oedipus, Polyneices, Orestes, and female characters such as Electra and Antigone, are all persons originally associated with such elite origins and have received the aristocratic nurture up to a point. Thus it is that, when Oedipus finds himself in exile, some spectators point out to him that he is in the wrong place.

ἀλλ᾽ εἰ θέλοντά γ᾽ οὐδὲ σοὶ φεύγειν καλόν.[313]

Even if you want it, exile is not seemly for you.

Despite the bad circumstances and his evident physical location in the outside periphery of his town, as an exile, the innate characteristics do not accord themselves with these circumstances. In being in exile, Oedipus is out of place. Out of place in his very displacement, the implication is that a more appropriate place for him would be “not in exile”, in other words, well inside his home town and well-placed there.

Glancing at the scenario in *Philoctetes*, a comparable line of argument appears in Philoctetes' own self-presentation and self-defense against prejudices with which he is assailed. The prejudices concern his nature, which Odysseus claims has deteriorated and changed beyond recognition. But Philoctetes' saving grace is that he finds a way to argue that, all through his long ordeal on the island, he has been keeping true to his own self just like a noble man should be. Instead of giving up to the odds, the act of holding on provides an opportunity to showcase his great physical and mental endurance, and to present the nobility of his constitution. Endurance in the face of adversity is equivalent

313 Soph.OC.590 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 382).

to, and supplants, many other types of virtues (especially military ones) that Philoctetes did not have an opportunity to showcase. After the introduction he has been given by Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, Philoctetes has a multiplex barrage of prejudices to override if he is to restore his social appreciation. As the play shows, he succeeds first and foremost in changing the mind of Neoptolemus. The dark and bestial picture the others had painted of him in the prologue of the play may suit their motives, but Philoctetes does not deliver to their stereotype.[314]

Philoctetes' loss of access to a life of dignity, colludes with his physical disfigurement in this portrayal. In Odysseus' account of these developments, a narrative emerges of how Philoctetes was reduced to the obscure existence of a primitive character living alone and in misanthropy, between the wild beasts and the bushes, almost himself a beast. We can understand motives and mechanisms in Odysseus' procedure of characterizing Philoctetes, and we can interpret the agenda behind this, too. But looking at Philoctetes and the things he says, we soon realise that nothing could be further from the truth than this idea that Philoctetes has somehow gone wild and turned into some kind of beast. His behavior in the circumstances is "exemplary".[315] Philoctetes is all but savage or unrefined; For Pucci, the greatest gulf of contrast gapes between Odysseus' mendacious weaving of words and untrue propositions, and Philoctetes' keen desire at last to hear the sound of the Greek language.[316] The mendacity of Odysseus'

314 Kosak (2006), 63.

315 Greengard (1987), 56.

316 Avezzu (2003), 189.

portrayals of Philoctetes is at least already implied in the fact that Odysseus has not seen Philoctetes for an entire decade, and his ideas on how Philoctetes might have evolved in this time are primarily based on his assumption of how he might have fared; Odysseus knows nothing certain of Philoctetes and his condition, prior to entering Lemnos, aside from the last piece of information from ten years ago. Contrary to what Odysseus could have assumed, Philoctetes never lost his motivation to live honourably. He still upholds the memory of Achilles and Ajax as his role models.[317]

One might compare Odysseus' casting of Philoctetes as some kind of gruesome caveman for the benefit of Neoptolemus, to Athena's meta-theatrical freak show of Ajax for the benefit of Odysseus in *Ajax*; both are designed to reduce sympathy by disparaging the victim to excess with particularly negative presentations of their character. Athena hopes that Odysseus will laugh at Ajax. Odysseus hopes that Neoptolemus will treat Philoctetes like a slave, or like an animal, and take what he wants without paying attention to courtesy. Both times, the plan does not work out as desired, but the picture of a damaged, shamed protagonist reduced to a parody of the man he once was, unfolds in both cases. Ajax describes himself using the word ἄτιμος ("shamed" or "deprived of rights"), which only betokens the outrageous extent of how offended he is.[318] Ajax's self-identification with Achilles runs deep through the rhetoric in all his speeches of self-presentation. It is further enacted in by the play's structure that recalls the action

317 On the structural functionalities of the memory of an absent hero, cf. Michelakis (2002), 163ff.

318 Whitman (1974), 67; Lawrence (2005), 27.

schema of the Homeric embassy. Achilles had left, because spoils of war were not shared out to him as promised. The embassy reches him, and it promises opulent rewards, provided that Achilles return to war, but it is too late to reconcile. In the *Iliad*, Achilles spews out how he has come to realize how ungrateful the generals are for his hard work. He can see those who stayed at home get the same rewards as those who went to war, but to have gone to war is much more risky and painful.[319] He is not interested any more, and recommends to all interested in his opinion that they should leave the war as well.[320] Becoming sensitive to the damages wrought by war, after realizing that the war's economic promises were vain, has changed his perspective, and he weeps over the war's great losses.[321]

In a parallel plot line, Ajax has been cheated of his—as he thinks—deserved inheritance of armour, retreats from fighting, and begins to go insane. He gets up in a mare to strangle and butcher all the cows in the field. Ajax did not receive the expected reward for his participation in the war. He had demanded Achilles' armour, but it went to Odysseus instead. Odysseus did perhaps not merit this reward, at least not in Ajax' opinion. But, with a cunning speech, Odysseus persuaded the committee that he was the most deserving of this valuable (and symbolic) suit of armour. Ajax considered himself the second best of the Achaeans, after Achilles, but his failure to be given Achilles' armour tells him that

319 Hom.*Il*.9.316ff.

320 Hom.*Il*.9.417-8

321 Monsacré (1985) investigates the importance of weeping and retreating to express one's emotions through the lyre, suggesting that Achilles' tears are a sign of strength rather than weakness precisely because they indicates an emotional engagement with war and an understanding of war's destructive power.

he is not thus valued by everyone else in his camp. He realizes that values and standards upon which he built his entire life are no longer relevant, and it is almost impossible for him to survive in these circumstances.[322] One may even safely say that it is absolutely impossible for him to survive in the circumstances, since he will end his own life soon after coming to grips with what has happened to him. Ajax's moral values are rhetorically inscribed in the same sort of discourse on heroism that exits in Homeric epic. For instance, he theorizes:

> ἀλλ᾽ ἢ καλῶς ζῆν ἢ καλῶς τεθνηκέναι
> τὸν εὐγενῆ χρή.[323]
>
> (…) Either to live well, or to die well,
> Behoves the nobly born.

This sort of statement anchors Ajax's ideology within the classic heroic schema of uncompromising morals, eerily similar to Homeric heroic codes of honour. Over two hundred years separate Sophocles' dramatic productions from the heyday of Homeric epic. One can glean how archaic and arcane this Ajax-character could appear, stuck to poetically intransigent principles that extend beyond life, and into death and into how to die a good death. If we consider that Sophocles was writing in an age where famines and plague epidemics were taking the lives of many, kings, citizen and slaves alike, Ajax's demand for a noble death comes across as even more arcane, and particularly unsuited to the circumstances. It does at any rate set into relief the shame felt by Ajax when he understood that he had been mentally deranged and

322 Michelakis (2002), 145.

323 Soph.Aj.480-1 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 24).

done things he had no recollection of, and had had no intention to perform.

Ajax exhibits his pronounced fear of gaining a bad reputation, a sentiment well-recognized by the chorus and other characters of the cast. It is cited as a good argument to feel desperation in this situation.[324] Set against the fear of failure and the shame of a bad reputation associated therewith, is a string of commemorative rhetoric that looks back admiringly on heroes from the Trojan war. Achilles comes first and foremost in this commemorative rhetoric, Achilles whose commemoration is tainted by Ajax's failure to receive his armour as a gesture of respect and emulation. The commemorative discourse unfolds through the voices of Ajax and his brother Teucer, who speaks for Ajax posthumously. It will eventually be echoed also by Agamemnon, Menelaus and Odysseus once the conflict about Ajax's burial is settled. Agreement is found eventually. However, for the lion's share of the drama, the rhetoric that fondly commemorates Achilles and its associated discourse of heroic values exists only in the house of Ajax, in other words, in a parallel sphere. To the rest of the community, those ideas for a long time have remained unseen and unheard. They have been ignored as antiquated and no longer relevant. All this existed only in a private world, within the segregated universe of *Ajax* and its spaces of action. Eventually, the spaces of action reconvene as the Aridae and Odysseus physically propel themselves, and discursively gain closeness to, the place where Ajax lived and died. Prior to this, commemorative praise for heroes of a past age (Achilles, but also to Hector) existed exclusively within the segregated sphere of Ajax's withdrawn way of life, and in all of his speeches. Within this

324 Soph.Aj.504-9 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 22)

private world, unfolds a string of self-identifications that ties up Ajax's sense of who he is with the character of Achilles, and also with Hector. At a deep and nuclear level of identity and self-realization, Ajax emulates only Achilles, and for the same reasons he prefers Hector to the men from his own camp. It is with Hector's sword that Ajax will commit suicide: Ajax recalls how he and Hector had exchanged gifts in friendship after a duel, which is reported in the *Iliad*.[325]

> ἐγὼ γὰρ ἐξ οὗ χειρὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἐδεξάμην
> παρ᾽ Ἕκτορος δώρημα δυσμενεστάτου,
> οὔπω τι κεδνὸν ἔσχον Ἀργείων πάρα.[326]
>
> I accepted this, from his hand,
> From Hector, a gift from the worst enemy,
> Since I got nothing worthy from the Achaeans.

This exchange of gifts between enemies, who overcome the political enmity through family friendship, recalls the famous passage from *Iliad* 6 on Diomedes and Glaucus. Here, the same plot dynamic of competing codes of conduct and of morals comes to light. The ties of an old family friendship between two men from different cities will take precedence over the fact that they now find themselves as soldiers fighting on opposite sides. Times of peace are briefly reminisced upon. In *Ajax*, the exchange of gifts with an enemy is underscored by Ajax's later dissidence from, and anger at, his own army camp. Yet, in a seemingly (and I must stress, seemingly) paradoxical fashion, in his last breaths of life Ajax will call Hector an enemy (an "ill-foreboding one"). This contradicts Ajax's own earlier appraisal of Hector, and obliterates his own computations of the friendship and its comforts. He turns

325 Finglass (2011) 333-4.

326 Soph.Aj..662-5

instead to the realisation that Hector was the most hated of his enemies, perhaps not only because he will use against himself the sword with which Hector had presented him. The apellation also berays Ajax's own continued feeling of belonging to the Achaean war corps—just not in its present form, which he has come to despise and expose as a bad copy of itself, not worthy of its name, just like Ajax's reward (anything short of the armour of Achilles) was not worthy of Ajax. In one way, the Achaean army's failure to reward Ajax appropriately is failing more than only Ajax, it fails the entire army. In this optic, one faces once again the great incompatibility of the two worlds. Ajax's viewpoint has become submerged by the dominant discourse; this is how his exclusion works at its base level.

The comparison with Homeric epic and the plot of *Ajax*, then, has its limits. Although plot lines are similar, we must not mistake references to Achilles and the Trojan war setting for an imitative continuation of epic tradition. Much more in the foreground are breakages with this tradition. Ajax will not, like Achilles, emerge with a reputation as the unrivalled hero of this tale. Ajax will not be sent profuse apologies, but be removed from circulation by Athena's spells of insanity. He will become a madman who is at one end feared in his strange violence, and at the other end is the laughing stock of the rest. Teucer wlll extricate a form of peace posthumously, but the burial will be segregated. Heated arguments break out on whether he should have a burial at all, and who should participate in it. Finally, Ajax only narrowly escapes the fate of his dead body becoming defiled like a traitor's by society throwing it out to be ripped up by birds and wild dogs, as the ultimate sign of his excommunication.

2. Submerged revenge: the long arm of fate

Ajax, through his dealings with Hector, is the first to blur these lines. Reflecting on how "uncertain is the haven of friendship", and acknowledging Hector as a dignitary representative of the ideals of heroic society and its values. That it was Achilles who killed Hector reinforces the kudos of owning his sword (even if nothing compares to owning the armour of Achilles). If Hector was an even match for Achilles, and Ajax was Hector's friend, and has his sword, then it follows that Ajax ranks similarly to both Hector and Achilles. Teucer ties together these conceptual strings of identity once again, calling into attention the entanglement of Hector and Ajax's fates.

> εἶδες ὡς χρόνῳ
> ἔμελλέ σ᾽ Ἕκτωρ καὶ θανὼν ἀποφθίσειν;
> σκέψασθε, πρὸς θεῶν, τὴν τύχην δυοῖν βροτοῖν.[327]
>
> Can you see how in time,
> Hector was to destroy you, though already dead?
> Behold, by the gods, the fate of these two men.

The entanglement of their fates is mentioned cryptically in a few places,[328] Ajax can be easily compared to the Hector of the Astyanax scene in *Iliad* 6.[329] In short, there are more than one mirror effects in the construction of these identities, which repose on shared behaviours as they are discernible through shared plot structures. In the end, Hector kills Ajax from six feet under, through the gift of a sword that ended up getting used as Ajax's

327 Soph.Aj.1026-9 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 46).

328 Soph. *Aj.* 662-4, 817-822, 829-30, 1026-32.

329 *Iliad* 6.461-600 and *Ajax* 530ff. Discussion by Schein (2012), 428-31.

weapon for suicide. We are to understand that Ajax has, until his death, remained true to himself, and true to the time from which he came—a time long gone. Ajax's departure through the means of Hector's old sword keeps him, even in death, locked well inside the sphere in which he operates. So too, for instance, is Heracles in *Trachiniae* killed by a toxic substance that holds within it latent intentionalities of his old enemies. Heracles is killed by poison, sent by Deianeira, but he also dies by the very long arm of Nessus and the Hydra, both reaching out symbolically to kill him from their grave through the contributions they have made to the poison Deianeira had in hand. Heracles' mode of death dashes his hopes of ever being considered a human, for it restores him to a context of monsters.

In *Electra*, twice we hear intimations on the theme of Agamemnon coming back to life to take his revenge on Clytaemnestra. Here, it is the axe which Clytaemnestra used to kill Agamemnon which is infused with a memory of what it has done:

> οὐδ᾽ ἁ παλαιὰ χαλκόπληκτος ἀμφάκης γένυς,
> ἅ νιν κατέπεφνεν αἰσχίσταις ἐν αἰκείαις.[330]
>
> The ancient bronze axe from long ago does not forget,
> which killed him in the most shameless disgrace.

The hands of memory reach far into the invisible past, from the dead Agamemnon to the lifeless axe. Finglass writes about this axe: “it is as if the awful act it was made to perform has left it charged with a dreadful power”.[331] The dead man re-acquires some agency through this strange contraption of fate, in a way

330 Soph.El.484-86 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 79).

331 Finglass (2007), 242.

that makes it impossible for their victim to move truly forward in time and away from their ties with the deceased person:

> παλίρρυτον γὰρ αἷμ᾽ ὑπεξαιροῦσι τῶν
> κτανόντων οἱ πάλαι θανόντες.[332]
>
> For men long dead are draining their killers' blood
> in a stream of requital.

Despite all her efforts, Clytaemnestra is thus recalled to her first marriage in her death. Heracles is recalled to his first crime of passion and the world of monsters; Ajax, to his home brand of male bravado and Achillean heroism. Their instruments of death recall these characters to a state from which they might, in their life, have roamed quite far, all as if to say, there is no escape from yourself.

332 El.1419-20 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 114).

3.1. Segregated world (1): Philoctetes in a time capsule

The ten-year hiatus from home news, has left Philoctetes in a kind of information bubble, and the attitude to life he articulates is like a time capsule of outmoded moral standards. The tragic hero is an imprisoned one, one who cannot leave the scene without dying,[333] as Roland Barthes wrote. The solution for such an imprisoned hero then becomes staying where he is, and bringing back to life the past events which have created the present awful situation, poignantly exemplifying Barthes' formulaic statement that in tragedy, “on ne meurt jamais, on parle toujours”.[334] That there is a ten-year remove in which many things have changed is only one of the problems with such an attempt at taking up the conversation just where it was left off. Many of the arguments and developments that form the core of tragedy and discussions on the tragic stage do in fact point towards times and places which are far away or long ago, spaces which we cannot quite grasp. The audience has to take the characters' recollection of the past for true, because much of what is spoken of in tragedy is not shown to the audience, for it is part of a remote past.[335] This is particularly true of those tragic characters who are exiled or spend a long time somehow living outside of the city and its society: Deianeira, Philoctetes, Orestes and Oedipus at Colonus are particularly strong examples, but the same applies on a lesser

333 Barthes, 63.

334 Barthes, 61.

335 Hammond (2010), 6-7.

scale to Ajax, Polyneices, and more. The distance from the community, in space and in time, has for corollary that these characters become exceedingly concentrated on their own past and on the events they remember from the time when they were still a part of that community. The real time in which they continue their existence, by contrast, moves forward in a somehow insignificant manner, which they deem both uneventful and purposeless. The ten years that Philoctetes spent on Lemnos seem to be only one same afternoon; or, as Guidorizzi more eloquently put it, these characters live in a time that is not really a time but rather a parenthesis of time.[336] Thus for Philoctetes, the days just pass identically one after the other, and it goes similarly for Oedipus, banished out of Thebes, who roams the plains with Antigone always perpetually repeating the same actions in a vacuum of time that is devoid of significant events;[337] this suspension in time is a classic description of boredom alike to the Odyssean station on the island of Calypso promises to be a threat to the real quest of the hero: if they are to forget themselves there, they would lose their significance as soldiers and as warriors.

336 Guidorizzi (2008), XX-XXI.

337 See Guidorizzi (2008), XXI.

3.2. Segregated world (2): Aeacean heterocosm

At many points in Ajax's speeches, we find aperçus of an inverted world.

> ἰὼ
> σκότος, ἐμὸν φάος,[338]
>
> Oh
> darknes, my light

This is just one small but incisive example. Ajax knows he is being peculiar, that is why he says that darkness is "his" light. He is quite aware that he is living in a private world; out of spite for the reality, but also out of desperation with it. Ajax has come to live in his personal bubble or heterocosm. Not so Oedipus, who, just as another small example, still equates darkness with awful demise.

> ἰὼ σκότου
> νέφος ἐμὸν ἀπότροπον, ἐπιπλόμενον ἄφατον,
> ἀδάματόν τε καὶ δυσούριστον ὅν.[339]
>
> Oh darkness'
> cloud that is my reversal, unspeakable coming,
> uncontrollable and all-ravaging

The defeated and undone Oedipus invokes a "cloud of darkness" as the force that turned his fate from prosperous to awful. It is the moment of Oedipus' horrible realization that he is doomed, and that he always was doomed, and that it is too late to rectify the things which led to his condemnation. As the amply deployed vocabulary of disaster and defeat illustrates, Oedipus' outcry

338 Soph.Aj.394 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 18).

339 Soph.OT.1313-5 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 171).

bemoans that this evil cloud of bad fortunes is impossible to tame and harmful like a wild beast that is far too strong to be taken on. This is the more expected form of thought, by contrast with Ajax's impression of a "happy Hades".

By the same incongruous logic, Ajax concludes his farewell speech on the note of happiness to be on the way to the underworld.[340] This lightly topsy-turvy flavour is strewn across all of Ajax's speeches—perhaps as a linguistic feature designed to sustain the trope of his "craziness", or, more plainly, as a pitiable illustration of how distorted must be the mind of him who lives by moral standards as arcane as Ajax's. To equate darkness with light, happiness with death, Hades with a place of safety, enemy with friend, all comes together to form the sinister edifice of the aeacean heterocosm. Traditional associations are loosened, a jumble of cut-up, distorted images awaits instead.[341]

His situation is made complicated by the fact that Ajax is not entirely sure who is a friend and who is an enemy. If Ajax was able to make an exception and find a friend in Hector though he was officially an enemy, so too he could grow wary of men from his own battle host, and whom he once thought friends.

> ὅ τ᾽ ἐχθρὸς ἡμῖν ἐς τοσόνδ᾽ ἐχθαρτέος,
> ὡς καὶ φιλήσων αὖθις, ἔς τε τὸν φίλον
> τοσαῦθ᾽ ὑπουργῶν ὠφελεῖν βουλήσομαι,
> ὡς αἰὲν οὐ μενοῦντα: τοῖς πολλοῖσι γὰρ
> βροτῶν ἄπιστός ἐσθ᾽ ἑταιρείας λιμήν.[342]
>
> an enemy should be hated to such a degree
> that he could in the future be a friend again; and as for this friend,
> I should want to serve and help him insofar as

340 Soph.Aj.691-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 29).

341 Soph.Aj.659 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 27).

342 Soph.Aj.679-83 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 28).

> he won't always stay. In fact, for the majority
> of men, the harbour of friendship is an uncertain one.

His recent realizations of how artificial and mutable the distinction between friendship and enmity really is. Ajax is destabilised in the face of a potentially ubiquitous threat, where friends soon turn out as enemies, and those who (politically) officially are the enemy show themselves to be much friendlier individuals instead.[343] An example of how things can be seen much more simply is how Creon in *Antigone* advises Haemon that little is worse than enemies who reveal themselves to be friends. Creon thinks that Haemon should lay off Antigone at the soonest, because she has shown herself to be opposed to Creon's statemanship.[344] Haemon should dump Antigone and "let her find a husband in Hades". For Creon, an enemy of the state is also an enemy of the family. This is not the case in the friendship between Ajax and Hector. Ajax has dissolved in his mind some of the boundaries and split the concept of military alliances away from the concept of family friendships. Hector is a military enemy, but a family friend; Ajax shuffles Hector back and forth between both categories, unsure if he should think of him as friend or foe. In pair with the difficult dance around the notions friend and enemy, ally and foe, and the profundity of change in human relationships, the threatening image of a laughing enemy flags itself up again and again. Ajax now sees the world in many scintillating tones, having relinquished the thought of it being all black and white and of moral codes working like clockwork. He knows that friendship and enmity can come and go, and he has learned the hard way that being part of an army does not mean being treated well by it. Ajax

343 Knox (1961), 19.

344 Soph.Ant. 651-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 209).

experiences a heightened sense of anxiety and hostility, in particular as regards Odysseus who comes across as hostile in these instances. After Athena's first stab at a freak show featuring Ajax (which moves Odysseus to pity) the chorus in talking to Ajax use the fear of mockery as a way compelling him back to the social protocols from which he has departed.[345] Ajax duly lets himself be compelled to take extreme measures at the very thought of his enemies laughing at him.[346] An example of one character assuaging just this fear is Creon in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Oedipus expects blame and ridicule from Creon, yet Creon reassures him that he would never add insult to injury.[347] Athena had presented Ajax to Odysseus like a parody of himself, to make him laugh.[348] Odysseus failed to humour her, too stricken by empathy. Despite this fact, which Ajax was not witness to, in his mind Ajax can all but hear Odysseus laughing in the distance.[349] Dillon has counted approximately fifty instances of mocking laughter between hostile parties mentioned in the play;[350] in all, the mocking laughter at an enemy's misfortune is a particularly frequent theme in *Ajax* compared to other plays. Laughter in tragedy is not of the fun-loving type, it is rather the mean type, that celebrates the cost of one’s good luck to one’s enemy, whose bad luck and demise has to be considered a boon.

345 Soph.Aj.151-53 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 8).

346 Soph.Aj.961-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 39).

347 Soph.O.T.1422-3 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 175).

348 Soph.Aj.79 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 6).

349 Soph.Aj.381 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 17).

350 Dillon (1991), 345. On laughter in tragedy, see Wallace (2013), 201-224.

πῶς γὰρ οὔχ; ὅτῳ πάρα
μηδ᾽ εὐτυχοῦντι μηδὲν ἥδιον γελᾶν.[351]

And how ever not? Nothing is sweeter
than to laugh at someone who is out of luck

We can speak of an "Aeacean heterocosm", of Ajax's "inverted world", but of course none of this should lead to the contemplation of a festive, inebriational topsy-turvy microcosm, even though the tragic festivals were certainly associated with inebriation.[352] The inverted world that rises from Ajax's speech hand in hand with the commemoration of Achilles is a dark and bitter one, where laughter exitsts only to cause stings. We find topsy-turvy in tragedy in various incarnations. Aside from instances where laughter is elicited by blows of fate to an enemy, there is also the resigned, but mocking and supremely deprecatory laughter that at heart deplores how badly things have turned out. For example in *Oedipus Coloneus*, Oedipus chides his sons for acting shamefully, calling them out on their "Egyptian" manners, which are in this case anathema to Greek culture:

351 Soph.Aj.1010-11 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 41).

352 Friedrich 1996: 264-5 paraphrasing Goldhill "the festival of the Great Dionysia advertises the civic ideology of the polis and has it subverted through its other constitutie component, the dramatic contest: Goldhill calls this the paradox of Attic tragedy. The subversive paradox is the via regia by which Dionysos, conceived as the god of paradox, triumphantly returns and proves the ancient proverb wrong. The Great Dionysia, then, represents 'the interplay between norm and transgression'; and it is through paradox, transgression, and subversion that Goldhill reinscribes Dionysos into Attic drama—the 'divinity associated with illusion and change, paradox and ambiguity, release and transgression'".

ὦ πάντ᾽ ἐκείνω τοῖς ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ νόμοις
φύσιν κατεικασθέντε καὶ βίου τροφάς:
ἐκεῖ γὰρ οἱ μὲν ἄρσενες κατὰ στέγας
θακοῦσιν ἱστουργοῦντες,[353]

True image of the ways of Egypt that they show in their spirit and their life! For there the men sit weaving in the house, but the wives go forth to win the daily bread.

For Guidorizzi, this is a direct reminiscence of Herodotus (II.35,2), who precisely makes this argument about Egypt in the *Histories*.[354] The trope of an upside down world, of which the oldest example in Greek literature might be in Archilochus (fr. 122 West) uses reference to the Egyptian world as a space of cultural opposition.

Ajax's monologues begin and end with flourishes on the cosmic order of all things, how night follows day, and the seasons one another. It is tempting to read these cosmic images as directly relating to other moments in speech, where Ajax describes all the uncertainties of his life and raises the possibility of an uncanny upside-down world, in which he seems to live. However, the order which he deplores the most is surely the old social order, in which he was someone, now that he is no-one. The existence of his segregated upside-down world must find its explanation in the reversal of the social order, that has propelled him to exclusion.

As is often stressed by scholars, the historical period of 5th-century Athens was one of rapid social and political change. It left many grappling for ways to make sense of life and for dependable moral principles. Karl Reinhardt's classic 1960 essay on the crisis of

353 Soph. O.C., 337-40 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 371).

354 Guidorizzi (2008), 252.

sense in Euripides[355] is an exposé of how a chaos of moral values followed the post-war turmoil in Athenian zeitgeist at the turn of the 5th century. *Philoctetes* falls within this Euripidean period. The staged comparison of Odysseus against Philoctetes, who leans on the Iliadic Achilles,[356] gives an entrance into the troubles of defining what really makes a Greek hero, specifically in the late 5th century.

That a long expanse of time separates the Homeric narrator from the Sophoclean sub-plot, is obvious not just to "us" who see and know it, but also seems to be understood by the characters inside the play. Technically, characters like Odysseus should not know that they are no longer playing a part in a Homeric epic and instead are transposed into their own future in 5th century Athens. In fact, it is patently impossible to account precisely for their time travel in terms of the ideology they propel, but not in terms of the Trojan war, which they have never left. The comparison of plots between the plot of *Ajax* and the Homeric embassy goes only a short way in explicating some of these shifts. Devices like Philoctetes' ten-year remove from the advance of time in terms of the army's *forma mentis* can stand as one relatively clear example of how Sophocles represents the contrast between an arcane and antiquated mindset, and the modern one. Philoctetes' ten fictional years would represent the two hundred real years that have passed and during which Odysseus became the first man and Achillean heroisms are all but derided.

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355 Reinhardt (1960), 227-246.

356 Schein (2013), 16: "Odysseus in the play is characterised not as his Homeric self but as a type of 5th-century Athenian political leader, ready and willing to lie for the sake of personal profit and the needs of his community".

4. Submerged Achilles : Neoptolemus

The incident of Achilles' armour and how it ended up in Odysseus' possession rather than Ajax's forms the central premise of *Ajax*. It is also retold in *Philoctetes*. Neoptolemus' semi-mendacious tale of how he arrived at Troy long after Achilles and Ajax were both dead, and had no more success than Ajax at getting Achilles' armour off Odysseus knits together common threads between the fictional individuals Philoctetes, Ajax, and Achilles. Neoptolemus delivers the news that Achilles has died, and then also, that Ajax has died. Philoctetes reacts to these news as if pieces of his own self are disappearing with death of these two men. He realizes that he is perhaps "the last representative of a kind of heroism that once animated the Greek world".[357] Surely the setting of ten years alone on Lemnos lets viewers suppose that Neoptolemus is about to enter a time warp, where an old ideology and maxims of life have been preserved like in a time capsule. Philoctetes certainly is reluctant to adjust to the idea that times have changed. Odysseus, on the other hand, was absolutely present and in situ for the bequest of Achilles' armour, and now he has come to see Philoctetes, because Philoctetes too has a piece of weaponry that Odysseus wants for his collection. The bow was given to Philoctetes by Heracles and is said to be destined for the final winning blow in the Trojan war. For lack of an Athena to put clouds over his judgment like in Ajax, the ten-year absence works well enough to embody the inferior position of Philoctetes' understanding. Odysseus takes full advantage of his knowledge that Philoctetes is operating with an outdated set of information and a system of values rapidly becoming obsolete. He offers him a

357 Beye (1970), 65.

chance of living up to his potential and at last becoming the hero that he always had wanted to be, but never was given a chance to. When Philoctetes hears that Neoptolemus is Achilles' son, and that Achilles is dead, he steps in to become Neoptolemus' surrogate father, and for a brief moment gives full articulation to some of his moral principles. Neoptolemus, though instructed by Odysseus to dupe Philoctetes, finds himself strangely charmed and attracted by these perhaps old-fashioned, but profoundly persuasive maxims of life that Philoctetes has to offer. Surely his entrancement is owed to being the son of his father. Even though Neoptolemus never met Achilles, he must be familiar with the values Achilles had come to represent and commemoratively stood for. Folowing his indecisions between the competing fathering efforts put forth by Odysseus and Philoctetes, ultimately the only true role model has to be his real father, Achilles. Philoctetes comes close to Achilles, and this is how Neoptolemus switches allegiance.[358] When Neoptolemus is sent to Philoctetes with a "script" given to him by Odysseus, in which he is to talk about the armour of Achilles, he becomes entangled in realizations about who he himself really is. Charged with the task to present arguments of which Achilles would have approved, but to present them falsely as a trick for Philoctetes to fall for, Neoptolemus is bound to question his own agency in this plan. We can reproduce Falkner's analysis:

> Neoptolemus has been playing himself, or a version of himself, that he cannot keep separate. Philoctetes

358 Kyriakou (2011), 264.

> in turn has been spectator to a fiction, but one he has not recognized as such.[359]

This ends “in a sinister piece of theatre that has come crashing to a halt and left actors and audience trapped, scriptless, somewhere between illusion and reality”.[360] Neoptolemus grows increasingly aware of his own instrumentalization by Odysseus. Since it is not exactly flattering to the ego to be told to play oneself, but as a joke, Neoptolemus gradually comes around to the realization that Odysseus' request is a backhanded putdown. Neoptolemus' posthumous, second-hand memory of his father Achilles is an important driving force in his search for the right ideals to follow.[361]

The promise of a medical cure is given to Philoctetes, conditional upon his cooperation. We soon see that the promise of medical treatment is false. Philoctetes values honesty and raw strength rather than the ability to use trickery in order to succeed. This is exactly what Neoptolemus, too, had tentatively queried in Odysseus (86-7). At once overruled by Odysseus, Neoptolemus had to obey, but in Philoctetes now he finds a new ally whose teachings resound with him far better. In this moment, Philoctetes awakens in Neoptolemus the dormant potential for an Achillean identity. As Beye wrote, he creates “a noble figure in Neoptolemus”.[362]

The angered and pained Philoctetes, Ajax, like their structural ancestor Achilles of Iliad 9, work hard to expose the falsehoods

359 Falkner (1998), 29.

360 Falkner (1998), 29.

361 Kyriakou (2011), 264ff.

362 Beye (1970), 72.

they were told at the start of the war. They accuse the officials for letting them down under false pretense of friendship, and make room to express and explore the shock and horror that has entered their whole being and feelings upon witnessing the human damage of war. Naturally then, they have had to revise their satisfaction with the culture they were raised in, since they were so suddenly excluded from it. As they begin to understand the borderlines and cruelty inherent in their own culture, they soon begin to dissect it completely. Both are disillusioned about the war, and both are disappointed with their friendships. We may find to be incidental, however, scholars of exile as a literary topos do trace these structural threads in several exiled characters. The scholarship on exile has long noted that self-heroization is a common trope shared by many characters who find themselves in exile,[363] and we may well add examples from our own study to this group. What is more, exile as a state of being is not necessarily limited to being banished from somewhere. It includes the person's dissociation from the group.[364]

Philoctetes can exemplify the frugal and dejected life of an exile, with nothing a cave for a home, and soothing his wound with nothing but a herbal remedy he discovered by serendipity,[365] instead of availing himself of the advice and remedies of medical men. According to Ceschi's study, the description of Philoctetes' illness is congruent with historical accounts of the plague and also with symptomatology described in the hippocratic corpus.[366] Beyond symptomatology, a deprecatory set of characterization

363 Gaertner (2007), 5.

364 Gaertner (2007), 10-11.

365 Soph.Phil.649-50 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 320).

366 Ceschi (2009), 225-32.

elements are superimposed upon the base and so to speak 'realistic' description of a physical condition. Elements of speech that show Philoctetes as primitive and bestial are intent upon justifying his relinquishment on the abandoned island.[367] Philoctetes' rude awakening, even unbeknownst to the grim portrayal that has been given of him since, concentrates on the pain of being exiled and the tears of anger, too.[368]

Electra bemoans such a situation of herself as she has been excluded from the home and since that time her life is monotonous and dismal.

> πανσύρτῳ παμμήνῳ πολλῶν
> δεινῶν στυγνῶν τ᾽ αἰῶνι.[369]
>
> my life swept through all
> the months by abundant terrors and horrors!

Not only of herself, but also of Orestes does Electra bemoan the exile, intimating that he can only have fared as badly as herself or possibly worse, and might be wasting away on the outside of society. She accuses Clytaemnestra of letting this happen.[370]

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367 Segal (1981), 35.

368 Soph.Phil.276-8 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 306).

369 Soph. El.851-2 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 93)

370 Soph. El.601 (Lloyd-Jones 1990: 83)

5. Mirror Effects

This brings us to an aperçu of structural commonalities not only between narratives or plots, but also between fictional individuals, the way their character is fashioned and represented. Contemplating the dramaturgy of *Ajax* and *Philoctetes* together, both elaborate on the sulking hero, but the narrative catches each one at a different point in time. Philoctetes was thrown on to Lemnos ten years ago and will receive an embassy which he angrily rejects, whereas Ajax willingly retreated and soon dies, long before any embassy can reach him. The play *Ajax* thus focuses on the earlier events in which Ajax begins to estrange himself. The estrangement of Philoctetes by contrast is shown as fait accompli and dates back ten years. The plot lines share a few commonalities, possibly as a spin-off of the character traits themselves. In *Philoctetes*, the embassy arrives that never reaches Ajax. *Ajax* offers a close-up of the hero's thought processes just after the fatal offence. And finally, this allows us to bridge into the plot of *Antigone.*

We may re-visit Ajax's suicide to understand more about the mutual fratricide of Eteocles and Polyneices. A structural resemblance in the plot and character drawing is visible during Ajax's dying soliloquy. Here, Ajax elaborates the theme of self-killing by the sword of an enemy (it was a gift from Hector) as conceptually equivalent to death at the hands of that very enemy. Hector's agency in the killing of Ajax is superimposed on Ajax's suicidal plans at the eleventh hour. In his final moments, Ajax recalls the friendship and the high regard in which he held Hector,

despite his affiliation with the Trojan army force. He recalls Hector's already completed demise at the hands of Achilles. The entire drama *Ajax* is premised upon the issue that Ajax was not granted but wished to have inherited the arms of Achilles. As the writer of the hypothesis comments, "the play is about how passion and vanity drive people to such sick behaviours as Ajax who, expecting to be awarded the arms of Achilles, upon not receiving them, decides to kill himself".[371] This might be oversimplifying Ajax's train of thought and gloss over the psychological aspect of Ajax's shame before himself upon waking from his hallucinations, as well as the many other thoughts offered by Ajax. A variety of oblique mirror images appears between Ajax, Hector, and Achilles in the final soliloquy of Ajax, and they are founded on a sense of mutual recognition, and self-recognition through one another. This sense of parity and mutual appreciation is not dissolved by the fact that with Ajax's suicide, all three men will have died. On the contrary, their affinity is reaffirmed through the concatenation of their deaths, and by the means of their deaths. Even if Ajax's death is strictly speaking a suicide, the speech associated with it conjures up a duel with an enemy, and evokes heroic values and the aristocratic breed of war heroes within which Ajax inscribes his identity. Ajax fancies himself joining Achilles, Hector and many more in the underworld and leaving behind a breed of lesser men.

One can see the conceptual resemblance with the fratricide at the heart of *Antigone*. The context of Ajax's suicide informs our reading of the death of two twin brothers at each other's hands. Their death carries the symbolism of resulting from a fight with an evenly matched enemy. It can not be denied that, being twins,

371 Rauthe (1990), 6. cites Hom.Od.11.543-548. See Nooter (2012), 37-39.

these brothers are infinitely more likely to resemble each other, than they are likely to be each other's opposite. The thought of their similarity seems irreconcilable with the theory of tragedy's engagement with “inventing the barbarian” or ascribing barbarian qualities to those whose fates are so tragic that a dissociation from the Athenian identity became necessary.

6. Estrangement as transformation

Polyneices' long absence from Thebes made his character increasingly uncanny to the Thebans. Structurally, this locus is belaboured by many ancient Greek literary texts, not least does the myth of Clytaemnestra's murder of Agamemnon rest on such a story. The difficult returns of Odysseus or of Agamemnon, who find their homes very different from how they left them, are attached to the Trojan war cycle that gives this sort of narrative an epic dimension (literally), in which every aspect is magnified and larger-than-life, and we may glance at these narrative structures for comparison. If Agamemnon's *nostos* was shot down in a bloodbath at the hands of his wife and her new husband, the end of the *Odyssey* shows Odysseus making a gigantic bloodbath of the many unbidden guests who, in his absence, had made themselves comfortable in his palace whilst vying for the favours of his wife.

Like Polyneices in *Antigone*, is a less-than-ideal Odysseus who, on return to Ithaca, controversially sets about reclaiming his own by force. In the *mnesterophonia* (suitor-killing), Odysseus more like a brutal killer than a hero abiding by a code of honor.[372] The controversial method and the negative tint it gives this whole narrative of Odysseus' return is reverberated structurally in *Antigone* and Polyneices' unsuccessful attempt to take Thebes away from his brother's governance. An unhappy micro-*nostos* after only one year in Argos, reveals how much Polyneices has in the meantime become reviled and gradually been disowned by the community.

372 On the Odyssean *mnesterophonia* see Brelinski (2015), 1-13.

This seems to be Creon's chosen *modus operandi* in *Antigone*. Susannetti has picked out germane case scenarios in Thucydides, showing how Athenian law forbade the burial on Attic soil of those who might have sullied their reputation with treason;[373] as he notes, a variety of practices are attested of what may have been done with the bodies of captured enemies, among which numbered throwing their bodily remains into a pit outside of town (Thuc.*Pel.*2.67). Creon pronounces a prohibition to mourn or undertake funerary rites for Polyneices, and enjoins Thebes instead to leave the corpse unburied outside as the food of wild dogs and birds.

> μήτε κτερίζειν μήτε κωκῦσαί τινα,
> ἐᾶν δ᾽ ἄθαπτον καὶ πρὸς οἰωνῶν δέμας
> καὶ πρὸς κυνῶν ἑδεστὸν αἰκισθέν τ᾽ ἰδεῖν.[374]
>
> No-one is to wail or mourn him,
> and his body is to remain unburied, and to the birds,
> and to the dogs, it will be food, horrific to behold.

Much as these propositions might be anchored in the historical reality of 5th century Athens, the αἰκισθέν τ᾽ἰδεῖν formula and the image of animals picking at this human corpse rotting away in nature, simultaneously lead back to Homeric epic, the threat of defacing or mutilating the corpses of enemies as an act of humiliation. In the *Odyssey*, the companions have to go back to recuperate the body of Palinurus and bury it, which already indicates how important the rite of burial is in the epic society. Famously in the *Iliad*, Hector's corpse temporarily lies deprived of its royal identity, mutilated and dragged through the dirt by an enraged Achilles. Hector's father, Priam, entreats Achilles to adopt

373 Susannetti (2012), 206.

374 Ant.204-6 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 191)

a more dignified manner with Hector's corpse, eventually bringing Achilles to revise his anger, make an apology, and return Hector's remains. These stories resound in Creon's threats as literary precedents, and the Homeric treatment of the theme informs the Sophoclean literary representation of a burial conflict in *Antigone*. Polyneices, deprived of his physical form and identity, is deprived of the possibility to die a 'beautiful death',[375] as Susannetti highlights with regard to the Vernantian findings; in this he is a conceptual cognate of the Sophoclean Ajax.

One may decide to see a direct line of literary influence and tradition or reception of Homer by Sophocles. Yet, if the customs and threats of non-burial described by Homer may seem outmoded in 5th-century Athens, Sophocles has chosen to include references to this theme, because it has not lost its significance in democratic Athens. This allows the play to pinpoint places of tension in the social fabric of 5th-century Athens.

Creon's threat to defile Polyneices' corpse may fall within a relatively common category of literary threats in Greek fiction. Yet, these literary threats only seldom become reality (in fiction, that is to say). The originators of these threats eventually will themselves to reconcile and be more magnanimous.[376] The most famous precedent has to be Achilles at the end of the *Iliad*. With this epic background in mind, the expectation is set up that the literary Creon might also perhaps reveal himself also to possess such magnanimous sentiments, yet he sticks to his guns. His reasons are political and strategic, in fact the entire burial conflict in *Antigone* is symptomatic of the power dynamics here at work. It is absolutely in his interest as ruler of the place to consolidate

375 Susannetti (2012), 207.

376 Griffith (1999), 30.

his power. To this end, exposing the corpses of enemies may be used as a deterrent for prospective dissenters of the leadership, an exemplary punishment that would discourage anyone from contesting Creon's power.[377] Much like the omission of arguments that could begin to offer an apology of Polyneices, deleting the memory of Polyneices from Theban public life through the denial of a tombstone, would symbolize Creon's ultimate victory in this dispute.

The parallel for the conflict over Polyneices' burial is in the second half of *Ajax*. When Ajax's body is found, and the Achaeans know of Ajax's secret plans to kill them all on a nocturnal ambush, Menelaus finds that such an act of high treason disqualifies Ajax from inclusion in their society and from the right to be buried honourably.

> ὧν οὕνεκ᾽ αὐτὸν οὔτις ἔστ᾽ ἀνὴρ σθένων
> τοσοῦτον ὥστε σῶμα τυμβεῦσαι τάφῳ,
> ἀλλ᾽ ἀμφὶ χλωρὰν ψάμαθον ἐκβεβλημένος
> ὄρνισι φορβὴ παραλίοις γενήσεται.[378]
>
> Because of this, no man is strong enough
> To bury this body in a tomb,
> But he shall be thrown on to the pale sand
> and become the food of seagulls.

As the premise of *Ajax* amply illustrates—Ajax went insane and diverted his murderous impulse towards a herd of cattle—Ajax received an injection of extraneous agency and was diverted in his course. The spell of madness rerouted his actions by way of duping his perception. Menelaus argues that Ajax has now fallen from grace, and is to be denied his aristocratic burial. Conflict

377 van der Plas (2014), 2-3.

378 Soph.*Aj*.1062-65 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 43)

about the burial ensues. The first half of *Ajax* lays out the pre-history to this burial conflict: why he wanted to kill them all, how it came about, etc.

This sort of explanatory preamble could is missing in *Antigone.* Ajax's voluntary seclusion (or self-exclusion) takes up the first half of the play, framed by the progress of his possession by madness and confusion. The discourse of his madness is accompanied by a discourse of his monstrosity and his bestiality, which sets up a distance valley in the self-recognition between him and the others representing the community in this tragedy. The estrangement Polyneices in *Antigone* functions in a similar fashion, casting Polyneices as bull-like. Moreover, the audience knows of Athena's part in inducing the madness of Ajax, and understands why his mental state is beyond repair.[379] "Athena gloats over Ajax's *nosos* of madness and imputes to Odysseus a natural fear of mad people",[380] William Allan writes, putting his finger on the all-important poiny that a fear of mad people is necessary for the ploy to work—and that it does exist. Allan adds that Ajax's madness is perceived as a punishment because of its shamefulness;[381] or simply it is a punishment because Athena had a little bit of unfinished business to settle with Ajax. later in the play, it is revealed to the audience that Athena is angry with Ajax (the predicament of Athena's anger is cryptically related by a messenger to have been foretold by a clairvoyant to be limited to one day only. Cf. 756-7, ἐλᾷ γὰρ αὐτὸν τῇδε θἠμέρᾳ μόνῃ / δίας Ἀθάνας μῆνις, ὡς ἔφη λέγων). To an extent, the arguable illogicality of Athena's actions is then explained by her state of

379 Lawrence (2013), 101ff.

380 Allan (2014), 266.

381 Allan (2014), 266.

anger. Seeing as she has super-human powers, the repercussions of such an anger of course take on proportions far more huge and sinister than would the anger of an individual human being. In her anger, the goddess acts like a major trickster with considerable power to influence people and events.[382] The mixture of rampant insanity and gradually accrued fear of mad people become two vectors of Ajax's estrangement, an irreversible change that then becomes the reason for his social exclusion.

In both the narratives of Ajax and Polyneices, the individual under debate undergoes a social trajectory from an original position within the social elite to becoming barbarized or animalized by the society, and ultimately deemed unacceptable. From being very similar to the most respected representatives of their community, they turn into a very different type through the construction of discourse operated by their community. Even though not long before, Ajax still was a well-respected member of the community, the insanity that now clouds his mind has transformed his actions from familiar rites into estranged and twisted versions of the same, disturbing to behold to the others around him. In *Antigone*, Polyneices' voluntary seclusion from the community and his smouldering hostility that ended in the fatal fratricide, lets itself be traced back to a broken promise, and the furious reaction based on a bruised sense of entitlement. Putting side by side the

382 Something akin to "daemonic agency" is introduced to the play through Athena's appearance in the guise of a major trickster who is fickle and unfair-playing, For comparison, Athena is also present to second Odysseus in Eur.(?) *Rhesus*, in a similarly capricious and demonic character role. The *Doloneia* is thought to be the epic antecedent of *Rhesus* and chronicles the ill fate of a nocturnal attack. It seems that the Athenian audience was expected to have a dim view of nocturnal attacks. See also Klinger (1940), 361.

voluntary retreat of Ajax and the exile of Polyneices in *Antigone*, the concern and conflict about their respective burials are the first visible commonality of the two plot structures. One can just as much speak of Ajax's *se*clusion as of his *ex*clusion. Ajax has retreated into his tent, voluntarily away from the others and from his military duties. To an extent, this could also have been said of Polyneices. Only in *Antigone*, this part of the story is eminently abridged. Seeing as they are originally highly aristocratic, male and well-trained, well-respected heroes, no natural cause is posited as the reason for their social decline. They begin from a status of belonging and appreciation in the community, gradually turn strange and eventually become disregarded.

Both Ajax and Polyneices, whose exclusion is founded on their great alienation from the community and their great acquired strangeness and hostility, appear as exceedingly similar rather than entirely different from, the main contender to power in whose interest it lies to exclude them (Eteocles in *Antigone*, Odysseus in *Ajax*). As we have seen in our discussion of Odysseus above, the most compassionate and deep-going self-identification for Ajax comes from Odysseus; and Eteocles is the twin of Polyneices, thus certainly very similar in terms of social position and the ability to identify. Not only is it arguable that they are ultimately fairly similar, but they are practically the opposite of "other".

Later, when he is already dead, at 1052-6 Menelaus passes a harsh judgment on Ajax, recalling to mind how he deceived and wronged the Argives.

ὀθούνεκ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐλπίσαντες οἴκοθεν
ἄγειν Ἀχαιοῖς ξύμμαχόν τε καὶ φίλον,
ἐξηύρομεν ξυνόντες ἐχθίω Φρυγῶν:[383]

We were hoping to take back home the same man,
An ally to the Achaeans, and a friend,
But when we came looking, we found him worse than a Trojan.

Menelaus seeks posthumously to exclude Ajax from the community of Achaean warriors, and also, to relieve this community of any suspicions or blame. But, if we are to believe Agamemnon, Ajax never even was anyone at all. Agamemnon addresses Teucer "claiming that Teucer, a 'nobody' is defending Ajax, another 'nobody'",[384] as writes Lawrence.

ὅτ᾽ οὐδὲν ὢν τοῦ μηδὲν ἀντέστης ὕπερ,[385]
You who are no-one, are now standing over
someone who is nobody

Teucer, acting as the living representative of his dead brother, must receive vicariously the insults aimed at Ajax. Agamemnon hits his stride and calls Teucer a barbarian whose language he cannot even understand. The logic of delivering a long speech addressed to someone believed not to understand a word of Greek is of course dubious,[386] but the insult is most likely hyperbolic. Lawrence analyses that in Agamemnon's discourse, Teucer's insignificance "is a function of his illegitimate birth, whereas he argues that Ajax is insignificant for two reasons, first because he did nothing outstanding (1236-7) and secondly because he is dead

383 Soph.Aj.1152-55 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 43).

384 Lawrence (2013), 113.

385 Soph.Aj.1231

386 the line is contested. See Rauthe (1990), 154.

(1257)", an argument that is certainly vulnerable to factual criticism on account that the play is premised on the award of being the best of the Achaeans.[387] The (possibly interpolated) mention of how Teucer's language sounds so foreign to the others that it seems to them he must be a barbarian glances at the theme of language as a cultural self-definition, which Sophocles expands at length in *Philoctetes*. Here, a gesture towards the final breakdown of language, and with it, mutual understanding, forms the climax of the play, which is a scene of Philoctetes' paroxysm where he temporarily loses the ability to speak clearly. The onomatopoetic exclamations have been variously interpreted as a token of the loss of self-control

> ἀπόλωλα, τέκνον, κοὐ δυνήσομαι κακὸν
> κρύψαι παρ᾽ ὑμῖν, ἀτταταῖ:[388]
>
> I'm dying, my child, I can no longer
> hide my disease from you

or the ultimate loss of *logos* which drags behind it a whole set of cultural losses.

An initially well-accepted individual is turned into an unacceptable one, and this gives rise to the process of exclusion, where exclusion is understood as a progress rather than a state. For both Polyneices and Ajax, who become excluded characters, the idea of who they are, moves from being originally "the same" to ultimately "the other", by a process of transformation taking place primarily in discourse and by way of conceptual attributions. In short, although Ajax's location in a peripheral tent,

387 Lawrence (2013), 113.

388 Soph.Phil.742-3

like Polyneices' location in exile outside Thebes, is already a symbol of their state of exclusion, their exclusion is accrued in function of the discourses held about them. Ajax's possession by insanity functions as a precipitating factor in his re-conceptualization as a raging animal, for instance, since insanity comes in pair with disappearing rationality, and this in turn comes in pair with growing bestiality.

7. Polyneices' claim to the throne of Thebes

Oedipus Tyrannus relates Oedipus' arrival at Thebes in guise of a stranger and moves towards a revelation of who he is: he is Jocasta's son, a royal family member rejected of old, mutilated at birth at her behest, under the ill auspices of an oracle, and subsequently cast out. Now, years later, he finds himself back at Thebes, fraught with incest and patricide. Polyneices' situation resembles Oedipus': both play the part of a returning departed, and of an unwelcome royal son of the town. Polyneices lies dead before the city gates, and *Antigone* hinges on the conflict about Polyneices' burial, all the while his corpse spreads pestilence in Thebes from outside where it is rotting in the open air without burial. Antigone travels in and out, with the aim of bringing Polyneices back inside for a glamorous, aristocratically lavish funeral. To do so would mean to restore Polyneices' place within the elite of Thebes, and yet Polyneices had left Thebes, married into another town, and come back to Thebes as an aggressor with a large army ready to help him claim the throne of Thebes by force. Only with difficulty, and perhaps not at all, can the Theban group identity reconcile Polyneices' origins as an aristocratic Theban, and his later putsch-like attack on the city to the extent of honouring his dead body with a pompous funeral. Thus approximately runs Creon's argument.

Polyneices' past actions, personality and character become a catalyst of the community's inner tensions. For Jonathan Strauss, the community "loathes and loves" through the lens of such complex characters,[389] and in *Antigone*, the *polis*' self-definition, its cohesion as a community, hinges on an agreement about how

389 Strauss (2013), 60.

conceptually to frame Polyneices, his personality, and its relation to the fictionalized city of Thebes. To some degree, the Theban identity is suddenly dependent upon how exactly Thebes will position itself vis-a-vis Polyneices. Thebes' self-presentation and self-identification is under challenge, because of the strange case of Polyneices. Whether to accept, to reject or to offset oneself completely against the civic and ethical values of which Polyneices—even as a dead man—is a personification, are questions at the heart of the discussion about Polyneices' corpse and what to do with it. The actors of *Antigone* show themselves aware that their discussion on what to do with Polyneices' corpse may well set a precedent for future discussions of its kind. The disagreements that the play dramatizes, the different views on when or whether it is permissible to bring Polyneices back inside, have been recognized by scholars to be evocative of legal debates routinely taking place in Athens and other constitutional *poleis* of the 5th century, that were in that time undergoing a political transition.[390] The leadership of Thebes, incorporated by Creon in this instance, argues against granting a royal burial to Polyneices despite his royal origins being the son of Oedipus and twin of Eteocles. For, having lived in exile for a long time, and having led an army of enemies against Thebes in an attempt to overthrow Eteocles and to take in hand the reins of the Theban reign, Polyneices has not exactly ingratiated himself with the royal family of Thebes, be he a part of this family or not. Over the course of the drama, descriptions of Polyneices, what he has done and who he was, will render him increasingly foreign to the Theban community. Alienating descriptions that hint at his

390 Henderson (2007) 186-8; Harris (2012). My thanks to Thomas Poiss for drawing my attention to this aspect.

tyrannical, boastful, over-cruel, inhumane and ultimately barbaric personality align Polyneices with the political enemy and its dangerous portrayals. Not only the political enemy, but also the cultural one: the chorus of Theban elders in *Antigone* piles denigrating remarks on the portrait of Polyneices, highlighting his tyrannical behaviour, that is diametrically opposed to Athens' paramount values of democracy in a civic society.

The first choral ode recapitulates how an evil Capaneus arrived as one of the Argive Seven at the instigation of Polyneices with the intent to destroy Thebes and help Polyneices take power there. Polyneices, by association with Capaneus, gathers much opprobrium on account of his oversized arrogance and brutality. This man of left-handed endeavours has a breath like hateful breezes (137), his heavy breath is compounded with enmity and insolence. The portrayal of heavy breathing, as a trope insinuates ideas of madness, extreme anger, battle lust, inspiration from without.[391] Capaneus, depicted as a fuming and enraged fighter of evil, is in every way devoid of the measured and pious mindset that the Theban elders approve of. (Ζεὺς γὰρ μεγάλης γλώσσης κόμπους / ὑπερεχθαίρει ; "Zeus especially detests the boasts of a proud tongue", 127-8). The narration of the battle scene, which includes fragments of an invective against the opponent, functions in such a way that it progressively aggregates upon Polyneices many unsavoury character traits.

Meanwhile, by contrast, the city of Thebes emerges as an image of dignity and beauty painted in laudatory notes. It is shown as glowing under a στεφάνωμα πύργων ("crown of towers", 120), and emerging as victorious in the end. The architectural beauty of Thebes and staunch courage of its men in defending it, underwrite

391 Griffith (1999): 150-51.

the narration of this battle. The Argive Seven come out of by contrast, as evil aggressors akin to ill breezes and enraged brutes. However, this rhetorical schism between the goodly Thebes and its horrible Argive attackers, can not go the whole way in eclipsing the truth, which is that Polyneices is a lawful ascendant to the throne of Thebes. Polyneices and Eteocles come "from the same mother", in the dual case, reconnecting them in their mutual killing at the climax of the battle.

> (…) τοῖν στυγεροῖν, ὧ πατρὸς ἑνὸς
> μητρός τε μιᾶς φύντε καθ᾽ αὑτοῖν
> δικρατεῖς λόγχας στήσαντ᾽ ἔχετον
> κοινοῦ θανάτου μέρος ἄμφω.[392]
>
> Thetwo enemies, born of the same father
> and of one mother, against themselves
> they set their winning spears
> and died both, of a shared death

Without negating Polyneices' Theban aristocratic origin, then, his foreignness is constructed on the basis of his hostile attack, compounded by a pre-history of his allegiance with Argos. What is never explained in *Antigone*, but what it would be important to know, is what Polyneices' reasons had been for leaving Thebes to begin with. By one account, Eteocles threw Polyneices from the throne after the death of Oedipus. In *Oedipus Coloneus*, when Eteocles and Polyneices were young men, they fell out over their inheritance, and Polyneices was exiled. He married Argeia, princess of Argos. Polyneices and king Adrastus of Argus raised then an army, with which to attack Thebes intending to reclaim what was Polyneices' own.[393] With this marriage, it would seem as if Polyneices had voluntarily excluded himself from the Theban

392 Soph.Ant.144-7 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 189).

393 Brown (1987), 4.

society, an exclusion that the chorus of Theban elders has apparently fully internalised by the time of his return, so much so that they are able to draw up the elaborate set of contrasts between Eteocles and Polyneices, prince and enemy of Thebes, beautiful town and horrific army of intruders and attackers – beauty and beast. But things are not quite so black-and-white. From our position outside of the text and outside of that whole microcosm, we can recall a number of circumstances which the chorus, right now, are deliberately omitting.

Polyneices' exogamous venture and adoption of Argos as his new home town is perhaps an aristocratic rather than a democratic choice. Polyneices married a royal daughter. Socio-economically, this move certainly availed Polyneices of the means to gather wealth and soldiers. This calls into question Polyneices' loyalty to his own city, although one wonders how valid this argument really is since surely no-one would have objeted if Polyneices had married into a royal family and availed himself of an army that was going to support the interests of Thebes. The idea that Polyneices' foreign marriage is disloyal to Thebes only becomes important in the context of his subsequent use of that army to attack Thebes. Chanter has set this in context with the Athenian citizenship law from 451 BCE, that discouraged marrying foreigners.[394] This legal circumstance puts Polyneices' case in a somewhat unfavourable light to Sophocles' audience, which one is perhaps to visualize as a group of citizens whose daily life included spending time witnessing or conducting public legal deliberations in the law courts.[395]

394 Chanter (2011), 10.

395 I thank Thomas Poiss for pointing this out to me.

As the son of an incestuous marriage, Polyneices has chosen the opposite extreme and settled for a wife from another town. Yet as it happens, this distance to Thebes proves just as fatal as the incestuous closeness of other relations in the same family.[396] On the one hand, aristocrati families are not seldon accused of incest and keeping incestuous relations in an effort to keep privilege in the family and not to let it leak to any other circles.[397] On the other hand, aristocratic exogamy is frowned upon in the sense that it serves the same end of keeping relations between aristocratic families albeit from different towns.[398] Wedding vows to a lady of one's own town are far more pleasing to the democratic eye, which can't stand aristocratis marrying within their own circles.

Antigone is soon to be married to her uncle Creon's son (Haemon). Creon has strategically arranged his son's wedding to his own niece, so as to maintain, within the rulebook of a democratic *polis*, an establishment of aristocratic family members at the helm of this democratic *polis.* Susannetti argues that this wedding is but one corollary of Creon's project. As civit leader, Creon arranged a wedding that is aristocratic, but without being exogamous; that is civic, but also just happens to tie the knot within a single aristocratic blood line. It keeps the Theban royal family among itself, and allows family members to pass back and forth between them the control of the *polis*.[399] It strikes one as profoundly undemocratic; yet, Creon sees himself as a representative of the democratic *polis* rather than as part of an

396 Zeitlin (1986), 121.

397 Honig (2013), 98.

398 Chanter (2011), 1.

399 Susannetti (2012), 42.

aristocratic leadership.[400] In his capacity as the regent of Thebes, it is not in Creon's interest to recall into view that Polyneices could have had a rationale for demanding his right to the throne. Instead, it would be in Creon's interest that his son and Antigone married, in order to consolidate his position until bequeathing it to Haemon. Creon and his supporters argue that Polyneices was an enemy of Thebes and a stranger from Argos, and not at all a royal heir from Thebes. Polyneices' estrangement from the home city is emphasized, and his radical alterity is again and again put forth as the reason why even mourning his demise would be inappropriate, let alone the thought of a grand burial ceremony in his honour.

The pre-history of Polyneices' and Eteocles' feud over the inheritance and Polyneices' at least partially legitimate claim to the throne of Thebes is made eminently invisible. Creon and the chorus deploy rhetorical devices of blame and invective in order to exclude Polyneices from Thebes and preventing Antigone from claiming his Theban identity. Thus, the idea of who Polyneices was, becomes more and more despoiled of Theban roots. However, the acknowledgement of Creon's ulterior motives in this entire machination of exclusion and posthumous invectives on Polyneices, is the first indication that Polyneices' perceived alterity must to some extent be an argumentative construct. Philoctetes is visited on Lemnos on the premise of his portrayal as a regressed, dehumanized, animalistic shell of a man, yet Philoctetes will reveal himself still to be the old, honourable and refined Philoctetes that he had been. There is certainly room for the conjecture that the idea of who Polyneices was, is being over-written by a discourse of foreignness and extraneousness that serves the interest of his opponents, but wants verifiability.

400 Carter (2012), 22.

Partly, Polyneices' gradual estrangement from the Theban *polis*, the ejection of his corpse and refusal of burial by the city, is founded upon appraisals of this alterity, which itself is interpreted as the corollary to his life in Argos and his military move against Thebes. Gradually but eventually, the idea of Polyneices snaps into place as the enemy, the foreigner, the ill-understood, impulsive and unpredictable other. Yet, seeing as such a marked alterity is construed upon someone with royal Theban origins, we may understand that Sophocles' idea of alterity is a category that a person switches into, rather than always is and always was. Alterity as a psycho-social category, is here rooted in the narration of Polyneices' change of identity and transformation into the opposite of what he originally was. In other words, the ideas of self and other, identical and different, are not stable. They are open to change. Antigone's argument is precisely that Polyneices' identity as a Theban prince is identical once and for all. But, in the society portrayed in *Antigone*, a tortuous process of re-conceptualization underlies all the conclusions following from the recognition of Polyneices' fundamental alterity. Antigone's is only a minority view. It was possible for Polyneices to become strange and foreign. In short, otherness, being or playing the other, is an acquirable identity, and a receptive category. It is possible for someone to turn into another. Polyneices having thus morphed into an antagonist, he is no longer considered to be a part of the family. Harsh words to this effect are spoken by Creon, reminding Antigone that he has been cut out of the family pictures, so to speak.

τὸν δ᾽ αὖ ξύναιμον τοῦδε, Πολυνείκη λέγω[401]

And him, who is not of your blood, I mean Polyneices,

Creon stating that Polyneices is not a relative of Antigone's is definitely counter-factual. The word is said in anger; but it is significant. Similar words to that effect are uttered by Clytaemnestra in *Electra*, where they are tinted with more univocal opprobrium. Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus had banished Orestes after killing Agamemnon. At the moment when Clytaemnestra is brought the news that Orestes has died away from home, her reaction is one of relief and joy, much to the puzzlement of the bringer of the messenge. Quizzed about her lack of maternal grief, Clytaemnestra's riposte rests ideologically on similar reasons to those of Creon in *Antigone*.

μαστῶν ἀποστὰς καὶ τροφῆς ἐμῆς, φυγὰς
ἀπεξενοῦτο καί μ᾽(...) [402]

deserted my breast and nurture, and as an exile
he became a stranger to me (...)

Clytaemnestra disowned Orestes, and in this logic even as the biological mother, she does not have to keep up maternal love and it is not necessary for her to mourn his demise. Justified by the argument that he had estranged himself from her earlier in life, there is now no more room for familial emotions and maternal grief in this situation. It is also the logical corollary to Clytaemnestra's prior decision to murder her ex-husband and father of Orestes, Agamemnon, and then to drive Orestes out of the city. Such an action is certainly tantamount to annulling her first marriage and denying its offspring. Electra takes severe

401 Soph.Ant.198 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 191).

402 Soph.El.776-7 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 90).

offence and reiterates often how unacceptable it really is. Although Clytaemnestra has not sent Electra away, Electra demotes Clytaemnestra from the status of 'mother', to the status of 'boss', returning the rudeness of the disowning.

> καί σ᾽ ἔγωγε δεσπότιν
> ἢ μητέρ᾽ οὐκ ἔλασσον εἰς ἡμᾶς νέμω[403]
>
> I see you as a boss
> and rather less as a mother

This jars with the familial mother-daughter tie that originally defined their relationship. What is more, since these two women are royal bodies, the idea that Electra sees herself as a servant reflects negatively on Clytaemnestra. By conveying that Clytaemnestra is all too tyrannical, the patron and servant dynamic between two aristocratic women functions as a denigration of Clytaemnestra's character. She then appears as an unsavoury and abusive lady of the house. A similar set of attributes is fixed upon Creon in Antigone to convey the same negative attention. It is Creon himself who emits his own statements to the effect that he is the master and his niece is the slave. For instance:

> οὐ γὰρ ἐκπέλει
> φρονεῖν μέγ᾽ ὅστις δοῦλός ἐστι τῶν πέλας.[404]
>
> It is not appropriate
> to have grandiose delusions when being the slave of your neighbour.

Antigone does not need to intimate that Creon is bossing her around, he calls Antigone his slave himself, hyperbolically

403 Soph. El. 597-98 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 83).

404 Soph.Ant.478-9 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 202).

perhaps, but certainly emphatically and even more univocally than Clytaemnestra expresses the attitude in *Electra.* For Mark Griffith, Creon here simply sounds "like a tyrant or barbarian king";[405] although as an unmarried girl, Antigone inhabits a position below Creon's as the sovereign of Thebes and head of the royal household. But as the daughter of Oedipus, Creon's niece as well as future daughter-in-law and queen of Thebes, she is a far cry from a slave. In both examples, in *Electra* and *Antigone*, the unmarried girl of elite social standing slurred as a slave or servant predominantly because conflict has exploded on the subject of funerary practice. The extremity of this slur translates the high stakes of these burials, these decisions to include or exclude certain dead individuals in the city's roll of honour. Since the personality in case was disavowed and disowned by the royal house, those advocating their burial are threatened with the same excommunication. Electra's sustained and loud mourning over Agamemnon rouses Clytaemnestra's ire and is the cause for Electra's exclusion from hearth and home. While the mythological Clytaemnestra is tinted negatively in the poetic tradition of Agamemnon's tragic *nostos.* The same can not be said of Antigone. Antigone argues her several initiatives to bury and mourn Polyneices in the proper fashion, rather than forgetting about him and leaving him to rot outside of town, because she clings to the pre-history of Polyneices' Theban birth more than she rates his later hostility. What is more, no explanation is offered by the personages of *Antigone* for Polyneices' drastic course of action, apart the—contentious, granted—idea that he has somehow turned into a barbaric, bull-like foreigner and become an attacker as a result. That this is not quite how it went, we can

405 Griffith (1999), 206.

understand from copious other material on the Labdacid saga. In the Lille Stesichorus fragment, Jocasta gives a speech on hearing the damning oracle that her two sons will kill one another over ruling Thebes. She proposes a practical solution: let one take the castle, and the other all the gold and the money, and go abroad with it. The suggestion is much in keeping with the Sophoclean Jocasta's attempt, at the birth of Oedipus, to avert doom by outwitting fate and exposing the infant Oedipus in the wild so that the oracular prediction will not come to pass.[406] The myth of the curse on Oedipus' two sons was transmitted through "several famous epics", as Lardinois writes,[407] and we may presume that this means a few different variants of the story had some currency. One variant of that saga tells us that Polyneices and Eteocles agreed after the death of Oedipus that they would alternate occupancy of the throne each year, and Eteocles went first. Polyneices in the meantime went abroad. When Polyneices returned to claim his year of kingship, the tables had turned, and he was not welcome. Griffith has analyzed how the blame for the breakdown of the agreement is assigned to various facts;[408] but in *Antigone*, Creon lays all the blame on Polyneices for attacking Thebes, and no-one dares to contradict Creon so his affirmation stands for true.

Creon may have weeded out dissent, so that his word is not contradicted. Although Polyneices' attack on Thebes naturally makes him unwelcome and turns him into an enemy, Polyneices' attack on Thebes should be understood as the result, and not the cause of, the breakdown of the agreement. We have not advanced

406 Campbell (1991), 136-8.

407 Lardinois (2012), 55.

408 Griffith (1999), 5.

in any way towards clearing up why the agreement broke down. Yet for Creon, it is not an option to concede that Polyneices had any claim to the throne at all, or even that he was not to blame for the breakdown of his biennial rule agreement with Eteocles. Both concessions would seriously destabilize Creon's entire premise.

The *Oedipus Coloneus*, written long after *Antigone*, may contain a retrospective explanation of the circumstances.[409] The elderly Oedipus is disappointed in his sons for lacking generosity and sympathy towards their unfortunate father. When, at first, he hears about their fighting, he lays a prayer for ill fate on Eteocles and Polyneices (*O.C.* 421-4). When, later, Oedipus will speak to Polyneices in person, he disowns them both from his paternity, much like in *Antigone* Creon diowns just Polyneices, and Clytaemnestra disowns Orestes from her maternity.

> ὑμεῖς δ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἄλλου κοὐκ ἐμοῦ πεφύκατον.[410]
>
> But you are from another, and no sons of mine.

For Ahrensdorf, the ire of Oedipus in this episode will bring forth "what may be the angriest curse ever uttered by a father to his sons in all of Greek literature"(1383-92)'.[411] The moment of Oedipus' curses against his sons is also represented in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes.* Oedipus' last words on his deathbed prophesy that Eteocles and Polyneices will one day kill each other, unable to organize the alternate years' rule.

409 See Holmes 2013

410 Soph.OC.1369 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 413).

411 Ahrensdorf (2009), 69-70.

τέκνοις δ᾽ ἀγρίας
ἐφῆκεν ἐπικότους τροφᾶς,
αἰαῖ, πικρογλώσσους ἀράς,
καί σφε σιδαρονόμῳ
διὰ χερί ποτε λαχεῖν
κτήματα [412]

To the children of the wild
nurse, he sent wrathful
oh so bitterly-worded curses,
By an iron-ruled hand
to cast their allotment
of property.

In the *Seven*, after this prophesy report, the equivocation of the pair of twins and their mutual self-mirroring is dramatized via parallel structures and evenly matching replies, completed by their sisters Antigone and Ismene taking one of either sides of the argument in a symmetrical manner. In the *Seven Against Thebes*, distinctions between the brothers collapse, especially in their fratricidal duel.[413] Aeschylus presented Polyneices having an even more legitimate claim to the throne than Eteocles, by virtue of being the older twin. Zeitlin deconstructs the consensus that unites several of the characters from inside *Antigone*, which is that Polyneices sought illegitimately to usurp the throne and had no claim to it at all. But, like Zeitlin, we as readers or Sophocles' aupdience, are situated well outside the microcosm of play, where ulterior information on the Labdacid saga is available. Even though Creon's assessment is not contradicted in *Antigone*, we are able to consider this as a deliberate omission on the part of Sophocles' characters; Sophocles is showing us a whole group of people deliberately ignoring information that is readily available

412 Aesch.Sept.785-90 (West 1990: 105).

413 Zeitlin (1986), 137.

to the audience. Conceding that Polyneices was the older twin, that he was not to blame for the breakdown of the agreement with Eteocles, could have worked towards restoring some balance in the conflict of *Antigone.* But the aim in *Antigone* is to show how much Polyneices is undesired at Thebes, and is to be excluded from the citizenship, even as a dead body. Several characters in *Antigone* offer up the critical opposition between Eteocles as the good twin and lawful successor to Oedipus, and Polyneices as the evil twin and unlawful usurper of the throne. This, in turn, becomes a reason not to bury Polyneices. Yet all this falls into perspective less convincingly, when, as suggested just now, one keeps in mind more of the pre-history to the events in the Labdacid saga.

The relation between the *Seven* and *Antigone* is riddled with problems of text transmission history, for, according to some reports, the texts were altered in antiquity with each other in mind. Classical scholars of the 1950s and '60s argued precisely about this ending of the *Seven Against Thebes* in which the two brothers were set before each other in such neat parallelism. Suspicion arose of a Sophoclean hand in the creation of this Aeschylean ending that so tantalizingly produced the impression of forecasting the beginning of *Antigone.*[414] Mitigating circumstances, real motives, or any kind of apology of Polyneices' are all but eclipsed in *Antigone* and it is tempting, on the one hand, to use other texts that treat the Labdacid myth in order better to understand what is going on. Yet, if scholars have had

414 Dawe (1967) argues against Lloyd-Jones (1959), refuting the evaluation of a "dependency upon *Antigone"* esp. 22ff. Lloyd-Jones also summarizes German views on this issue since 1848. Scodel (2007), 145: "*Phoenissae* is itself the main source for the end".

reason to suspect changes having been made to the *Seven* with *Antigone* in mind, then the whole argument becomes somewhat circular. It is conceivable, as historians of the text have written, that the script of the *Seven* was changed in light of a fourth-century revival performance.[415] Since *Antigone* was among the most watched and most produced plays in the ancient Greek world, a performance where the two texts could blend into one another without rupture and blurring the disparate sequences into one continuous string of action, might have been an attractive solution. Considering this in more detail would go beyond the scope of this argument, and in fact it is already valuable to know that in the corpus of ancient Greek tragedies—whoever had a hand in creating it—the idea is present that Polyneices had a strong case for claiming the throne of Thebes and perhaps it was even Eteocles' wrong not to have let him take it.

415 Lech (2008), 661-4.

8. Mourning against the law, according to the other law

Although the pointlessness of lamentation is a frequent idea brought to the tragic protagonist throughout all the plays, the superficiality of such consolations does not succeed in producing a state of serenity with the circumstances in the protagonist. In tracing some of the tropes of what would later become the literary genre of the "consolatio", J. H. Kim has taken into account the consolatory topoi which exist in tragedy, duly noting that they never very well work : "Consolatory remarks direct the sufferer to adjust to circumstances that have changed. Such adjustment is expected to manifest itself in a variety of ways in tragedy, e.g. giving up lamentations, setting aside thoughts of revenge".[416] However, "the least common reaction of a consoled person is to accept the advice and adjust".[417] Explanations for this may be of an affective nature, but it also has to be said that the rejection of consolation is almost a dramaturgical necessity in every extant play, since as we have seen it is precisely the profound unacceptability of change that lies at the root of tragic events. For Loraux, the combination of an emerging consolatory genre and philosophy in Greek lyric, and the gradual politicization of grieving practices in the classical *polis,* added up to a theme complex in Greek tragedy that could be easily misunderstood. To cite Loraux, when inspecting the *locus classicus* of the futility of lamentation, "plus qu'un echo du theme tragique de l'inutilité de la plainte, on lira le désir de réprimer les manifestations de deuil

416 Kim (2013), 38.

417 Kim (2013), 43.

excessives".[418] Many interpreters of tragedy read the gnomic utterances of tragic choruses as gems of consolatory wisdom dispensed to grieving protagonists from a kind place in the heart of old men. This reading emphasises contrasts in outlook between long-suffering, wise and moderate choruses and the flaring tempers of tragic characters whose grieving demeanour is out of line.

The consolatory trope of inviting someone to cease lamentation on the basis of the futility of lamentation itself is compounded by a politicized notion of lamentation in 5th-century Athens. As Loraux has written, the gnomic verities of archaic lyric flavour that many choral utterances put forward are certainly in part the result of a poetic tradition and its *topoi*, echoed in the lyric form of choral song. But, what is more, the use of these gnomic statements on the futility of both life and the lamentation over death is particularly convenient at a time when edicts prohibiting loud mourning celebrations are in the process of being enforced at Athens. Nicole Loraux had written that initially, the *threnos* form had meant the belaboured forms of mourning created by the poets, but that poets of the lyric genre used the contents of threnoi to turn them into gnomic or consolatory tropes, enhancing this with an elaborate philosophy of living and dying. By contrast, so Loraux, in the heyday of the classical *polis*, both of these artistic forms of mourning lost much of their currency, appearing too strongly tied up with aristocratic ideas.[419] Luminaries of the classical *polis* counterpoised democratic values against the tendency to go into excessive-seeming grieving practices.

418 Loraux (1981), 45.

419 Loraux (1981), 44-5.

Creon's injunction not to mourn Polyneices taps into the democratic and legal discourse of the 5th century polis; at the same time, his decision to leave Polyneices' body to be eaten by dogs and birds taps into the imagery of a Homeric outrage that betokens a discourse of individuality and specificity in death. His attitude towards Polyneices, then, is determined by two separate types of ideological affiliation, converging in the aim to strip away the identity of Polyneices, through practices that are both democratic and aristocratic. The same is true of Antigone: she cannot be simply assigned to a role of representing the aristocratic form of thought—even if Creon accuses her of it. If, in matters of mourning, Antigone may appear to be inspired by Homeric traditions and therefore, reprehensibly, to be aristocratically inclined, the dichotomy between her and Creon as the staunch democrat does not hold water in yet another respect. Antigone does not exactly put on a grand show of lamentation, even though she probably would like to. Rather, as has been shown by scholars, Antigone appropriates elements of the Periclean funeral oration for the occasion.[420] Straddling both types of mourning practice, Antigone makes speeches that scholars have alternatively found to resound with Periclean echoes, or indeed Homeric ones. Antigone's rhetoric of mourning is simultaneously inscribed within the context of a democratic *polis* ideology that distances itself from the worship of aristocratic individuals of the heroic age, and it is assimilated within the very heroic context that the civic ideology seeks to check, too. "Antigone's two recorded mourning speeches – one for Polyneices (at the second burial) and one for herself – are both clearly marked as Homeric", writes

420 On the *epitaphioi logoi* and *Antigone*, see Strauss (2013) 40-43; Bennett & Tyrrell (1990), 444.

Honig.[421] But, as was just noted, equally present are echoes of the epitaphios logos.

Politicized and conspicuous, Electra's mourning in *Electra* shares *Antigone*'s identification of the isolated young woman's mourning with an unfashionably archaic ideology and idiom informed by aristocratic or Homeric heroic values. Clytaemnestra may dispense with mourning her husband (and, later, her son) on the basis that she is the one who killed him. Chrysothemis is as aggrieved by Agamemnon's death as is Electra, yet expresses her grief in a far more muted manner.[422] Much like Ismene plays second fiddle in *Antigone*, which only makes Antigone's colours pop, Chrysothemis provides the foil of contrast against which Electra's extravagance can shine in all its intensity. A less dramatic performance of lamentations and grief is unacceptable to Electra. Chrysothemis, like the chorus and Clytaemnestra also do, comes in the hope of assuaging and shutting down Electra's loud and ostentatious lamentation. Yet, Electra's riposte is a principled rejection like that displayed by the offended Achilles in *Iliad* 9, or Neoptolemus and then Philoctetes in *Philoctetes.* These rejection speeches (on which more detail below) have an accusatory tone and suspect that the bringer of the message is acting at the behest of the hated individual. This hated individual (Agamemnon in the *Iliad*, Odysseus in *Philoctetes*, Clytaemnestra in *Electra*) who does not himself dare show his/her face sinks even further in the recipient's estimation for using friends and family of the recipient as intermediaries.

421 Honig (2013), 104; Honig (2009), 5-43.

422 Easterling (1977), 122.

δεινόν γέ σ᾽ οὖσαν πατρὸς οὖ σὺ παῖς ἔφυς,
κείνου λελῆσθαι, τῆς δὲ τικτούσης μέλειν.
ἅπαντα γάρ σοι τἀμὰ νουθετήματα
κείνης διδακτά, κοὐδὲν ἐκ σαυτῆς λέγεις.[423]

Horrible to see you being no child of our father,
How you forgot him in order to care only about mother.
All the warnings you have for me
are her teachings, and nothing you say comes out of your own self.

Finglass sees here an "Achillean resonance", based on the self-removal from the community out of strong emotion. Both reject others' attempts to persuade them to come back. "Both reject the perceived hypocrisy",[424] he writes. We can exten this conclusion to other examples like Electra, like Antigone, who will fend for the importance of mourning Agamemnon even at the price of imprisonment, looming large for her at that moment. Chrysothemis seeks to convey the danger of Electra being locked away and thus officially expelled and rubbed out of family and community even more than she already is. Similarly to Antigone, Electra is not willing to change. Antigone for her part will even tolerate death as a condition, rather than agreeing to revise her standpoint on the burial of Polyneices.

It might be significant to note that in *Antigone*, not only did Creon's edict prohibit the burial of Polyneices, Creon also forbade anyone to mourn Polyneices. To illuminate this prohibition, scholars have put forth explanations anchored in historical Athens, where "over 150 years before Sophocles wrote *Antigone*, one of Solon's *polis*-forming legislations called for restraining what Plutarch calls the "wild and disorderly behavior" of women in grief (1960: 21.5), as well as the "breast beating and

423 Soph.*El*.341-4 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990:74).

424 Finglass (2007), 198.

lamentation at burials".[425] Like Antigone, so does Electra insist staunchly, and at great peril to herself, upon mourning the dead despite an explicit prohibition. Electra receives numerous admonitions to desist from what is perceived as an exaggerated amount of mourning over Agamemnon. She is certainly familiar with the normative gaze under which her life moves.

> ἔξοιδ', οὐ λάθει μ' ὀργά.
> ἀλλ' ἐν γὰρ δεινοῖς οὐ σχήσω
> ταύτας ἄτας,
> ὄφρα με βίος ἔχῃ.[426]
>
> I know, I am not blind to the anger.
> But I am not going to split from the terrors
> Of my passion
> As long as I live.

Looking back to poetry of the heroic age, loud and unbridled lamentation of the dead is considered the proper send-off for members of the aristocracy. Hector's funeral at the end of the *Iliad*, with the laments of Andromache, Hecabe and Helen, is an exemplary instance of such an aristocratic funeral (*Il.* xxiv 718ff.).[427] This stands in contrast to the Athenian *polis*' laboured aversion to such swanky shows of mourning. As Loraux suggested, in historical Athen, rituals of lament for the deceased were tolerated, but kept to a minimum. Funerary orations were preferred. For Loraux, the prohibition of mourning can be read to signify "une prescription proprement civique".[428] In other words, the funerary oration per se could obviate the need for, and is supposed to supplant the practice of mourning for an extended

425 Honig (2013), 100.

426 Soph. El. 222-25 (Lloyd-Jones & Wilson 1990: 69).

427 See Easterling (1991), 145-151.

428 Loraux(1981), 44.

period of time. These two types of funerary practice are not meant to coexist. But in *Electra*, or in *Antigone*, surely it is not meant that the problem with these young women is *how* they have decided to commemorate their departed. Creon's and Aegisthus' excommunication of Polyneices and Agamemnon extends beyond the measure where they take offence at a funerary practice over another. The message is that these two girls are not to commemorate their respective departed *at all*. No type of commemoration whatsoever is desired. Traditional aristocratic mourning celebrations such as they are also depicted in Homeric epic went out of fashion in the age of the *polis*, and became ideologically contested as a symbol of aristocratic power and occasions to flaunt wealth. In the democratic *polis* the funeral oration is on the rise, that takes the form of a celebration of the deceased's life and achievements. The funeral orations glorified the dead by recalling how they had served the city. At the same time, the funeral oration is required to substitute personal mourning entirely. For Honig, this reads like a re-casting of democratic citizens in a context of interchangeability and replaceability.[429] It is a shift that allows to move away from an appreciation of the private individual to an appreciation of the civic functions this individual performed,[430] giving the person a different kind of value in this way. This approach to the person could uniformize both life and death, perhaps in an effort to dissolve aristocratic hierarchies and create a level playing field for all citizens.

429 Honig (2013), 121.

430 Holst-Warhaft (1992), 124.

We have considered a set of so-called submerged scenarios and delved into the private worlds of some of Sophocles' tragic characters. On the one hand, this brought out how irreconcilable they are with their communities, how deeply their social exclusion is anchored in their own convictions which they do not regret or allow to have changed. In this sense, and contrary to the ideas of some other characters, their exclusion is final, rehabilitation would be futile.

What the consideration of these submerged scenarios shows on the other hand, is that the protagonist's own intrinsic reasons for their social exclusion do not even remotely resemble the motives given by others in their community. Retrogression into bestiality, departure into demonic insanity, self-absorption and synergy with diseases of monstrosity, excessive barbarity and sadistic violence: all these discourses exist around the tragic protagonist, that we have elaborated upon in our discussion of Polyphemus as a literary influence, symbolic portrayals of disease, and so forth. But they exist in a sphere to which the protagonist in no way subscribes, and to a good extent, they are ficticious.

Since the excluded accept their exclusions, even take pride in their convictions and resist calls to return into their community, one wonders why a parallel production of deprecatory portrayals assimilates the excluded protagonist with wild men, animals or monsters. Ultimately, this question will remain unanswered.

This takes us back to the futility of re-inserting or re-calling an outcast into the community, with which this discussion began. It is intrinsic in the personality and character of tragic protagonists such as Sophocles presents them, to refuse to take part in the new order of things. It is intrinsic to them to reject those who come for

them, proposing plans they would never willingly collaborate in, entreting them to accept the new situation and become a part of it. Their pride, integrity, and loyalty to priniples—at other time termed stubbornness or obsessive fixation on a certain reward—forbids them from being consoled of their upsets, and forbids them also to renew their ties with such a community. The proverbial olive branches are thrown back in the face of the tender, deemed to be false or to be a vehicle of secret evil ruses. A point of no return has been reached in the disagreements, nothing short of vengeance can erase the weight of injustices that have taken place; all the while a discourse of human bestiality, monstrosity or wildness flourishes among the community in speaking of this person, which drives a wedge between hero and community and poses yet another obstacle to any hope of reconciliation.

VIII. Conclusions: Social exclusion in Greek tragedy, or the tragedy of social exclusion?

As I hope my discussion has shown, the issue of blame for tragic events and the ethics of responsibility is subject to a handful of social processes in Sophoclean tragedy, which aim to promote the view that the protagonist has only himself to blame. In investigating how social exclusion works, we had an opportunity to inspect deprecatory characterization and the mythology which informs this. We have also analyzed a few examples of fatal miscommunication and seen that it is possible to detect a note of malice, or perhaps simply careless neglect for a person whose wellbeing and safety have ceased to be important to the others—as a result of their re-casting of the person into a sub-human category (or at least the inception of this process). Thirdly, we have seen how, though segregated from the rest, the tragic protagonist, to whom all this is happening, argues with a different value system and makes plain their personal deeper motives and convictions, that have led to their actions and their conundrums. The protagonists' self-revelation in this sense belies the extrinsic characterization he or she receives from the group, and belies the silent treatment they receive, or the brutal ways in which they are sometimes handled by their peers.

We have proposed an interpretation of these mechanics and manifestations of social exclusion as strongly tied up with the problem of blame for tragic events, which both sides are loathe to bear. The community is not prepared to accept a collective guilt,

even if the tragic protagonist is often accusing the entire society for having gone down the wrong path: to have ratified Creon's wish not to bury Polyneices, to follow the advice of Odysseus instead of sticking with Achillean principles, to be a part of the household of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus instead of commemorating Agamemnon: these are accusations thrown by one person against the entire community, and they of course contain within them the seeds of self-segregation. This produces a set of divergent arguments and versions of the story, built on disparate value systems. This simultaneous production of different meanings of a same story, or a personality, or a situation, manifests deep fractures in an otherwise tight-knit fabric of social interactions.

The fictional community presented by Sophocles acts as a more or less distorting mirror of the real community of Athenian people gathered to witness the tragedy, and invites critique, or auto-critique, upon itself. However, this all throws light not so much an image of the tragic protagonist as the excluded individual, as of the community at large and its shortcomings in the firm retention of all who belong to it. Against the critique that it is impossible that Sophocles might have seriously intended to undermine the Athenian polis' sense of self, we might level that the tragic festivals provided an opportunity to open up a can of worms, and then to close it again, as the festivities waned, audiences were inebriated and everybody has to sleep it off.

A fourth point that our study of exclusion in Sophocles has let us recognize is that the discourse of exclusion is olso often a discourse of disease, which is also often a discourse of transformation; and a discourse of bestialization or monstrosity. In othe words, the literal meaning of the actions and plot twists is

always already superimposed with symbolic layers of meaning as well as linguistic markers of a sociological order and its tier system.

In *Tereus*, gargantuan appetite for sex eventually leads to transformation into an animal, and departure from the human society in this very graphic way of a literal metamorphosis. The exclusion of Oedipus takes him to the hills and forests several times, where, quite similarly in fact to Philoctetes, Oedipus becomes less dignified, less finely clothed, more and more like a vagrant, a wild man or a bull. With excluded corpses, like Ajax's and Polyneices, a similar fate of brutalization is in store as their bodies become food for wild beasts and are no longer receptacles of dignity. As we can see, different layers of meaning and context feed into one another and mutually enrich each other. The city/country dichotomy is again and again channeled through the prism of disease, transformation through disease, and bestialization as a result of disease. The Sophoclean treatment of disease moves in symbiotic relation to increasing wildness, and wildness is shown in antithetical relation to the Greek civic identity.

All the completely extant tragedies present transformations perpetually about to happen, that do not end up happening, but have the same consequences as a real metamorphosis, in as far as an animal metamorphosis means a complete disappearance from human society. Philoctetes' perceived beastliness, for instance, becomes the excuse for drastic measures that Odysseus would not have taken if he believed Philoctetes was still a fully 'valid' human being. Odysseus rather takes similar measures with Philoctetes as he had done in his Homeric incarnation, during his encounter with the Cyclops: he goes in with brute force and dishonest tactics. The

script of *Philoctetes* does not go the whole way in delineating Philoctetes as a fully fledged wild beast, but rather intimates these ideas by a network of similes and metonymy. It is merely on the level of their social re-characterization as sub-humans, and through the intermediary of deprecatory discourse, that Sophocles' excluded characters gradually begin to strike us as more bestial, more monstrous than before. The disease of the tragic hero is fictionally presented as a vector of their alienation from the group, which stipulates the unacceptability of their change. The profound unacceptability of change is one of the few things that both sides of this mutual estrangement share and continue to express, each in their own way. And so, we might conclude that the most informative part about our study of exclusion is not the description of the process or its structure, but the fact that it is staged and presented as tragic, that it inhabits a central position within the genre of tragedy.

At the outset we began with the origin of the term social exclusion in the lingo of EU of the late 20th century. Guilluy's sociological prose on marginalization and the fractures of French society shaped part of the discourse of the 2012 electoral campaigns. Social fracture, segregation, exclusion and mutual exclusivities are becoming more and more intense and visible realities in European cities, as city-centres are rapidly becoming downtown business districts, and a multi-axial form of marginalization drives different groups into a whole array of peripheral and mutually segregated communities.

Traditional excluded groups, such as the unemployed or homeless, are a frequent subject of journalistic depiction. In addition to newspaper headlines about benefit claimants, a plethora of (reality) television programmes exist all over Europe. These

media purport to document, but in equal measure demean and demonize their subjects. In so doing, they speak to the same morbid fascination that in another century drew in visitors to freak shows, popularized the penny dreadful, or simply the sensationalist press. In this sense, what we have elaborated here with respect to Sophocles' work, is mirrored and finds an application in many items of contemporary cultural production. I will end this on a personal note, and state that what passes for journalism and reality television programming these days consistently fails to address the intrinsically tragic quality of social exclusion.

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